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ON THE

ETHICS OF NATURALISM

ON THE
ETHICS OF NATURALISM

BY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE Deed of Foundation of the Shaw Fellowship provides that "it shall be in the power of the Senatus Academicus of the University of Edinburgh to require the holder of the Shaw Philosophical Fellowship, during the fourth or fifth year of his tenure of it, to deliver in the University of Edinburgh a course of Lectures, not exceeding four, on any of the subjects for the encouragement of the study of which the Fellowship has been founded." The following pages consist of four lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh, in accordance with this provision, in the month of January 1884.

Since their delivery, the argument of the lectures has been revised, and in some places enlarged. I have also thought it better to modify their original form, dividing the discussion into chapters.

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THE ETHICS OF NATURALISM.

CHAPTER I.

ETHICS AND ITS PROBLEMS.

IT is a common remark that a writer's ethical doctrine is throughout conditioned by his attitude to the problems of theoretical philosophy. The main lines of dispute in questions of ethics may be regarded as prolongations of the controversies which arise in metaphysics and psychology. The Realism or Idealism which marks a speculative system reappears in its ethics, whilst differences in the psychological analysis of mental states, or concerning the relation of pleasure to desire, are grounds of distinction between schools of moralists. And not only are the special controversies of ethics decided in different ways, but the scope of the whole science is differently conceived, as the speculative standpoint changes. Thus, not for one school only, but for a whole period in the history

1 Connection of ethics with the theoretical philosophy

(α) Dependence of ethical or theoretic points of view

- (a) teleological, of reflection, ethics was regarded as an inquiry into the highest human good. Opposed schools agreed in looking from this point of view, however much they might differ from one another in defining the nature of that highest good. At other times,
- (b) jural, according to the prevailing view, to investigate and systematise the rules of conduct has exhausted the scope of ethics—controversies being carried on as to the nature of those rules, and their source in external authority or in the internal revelation of conscience. Again, ethical inquiry has been
- (c) empirical, apparently identified with the analysis and history of the moral affections and sentiments; while a purely external point of view seems to be sometimes adopted, and ethics held to be an investigation of the historical results of action, and of the forms, customary and institutional, in which those results find permanent expression.

These different ways of looking at the whole subject proceed from points of view whose effects are not confined to ethics, but may be followed out in other lines of investigation. They correspond to ideas which dominate different types of thought and form different philosophical standpoints. The first starts from a teleological conception of human nature, as an organism consciously striving towards its end. The second assimilates ethics to a system of legal enactments, and is connected with the jural conceptions of

theology and law. The two last are concerned to show that the subject-matter of ethics are facts which have to be treated by the ordinary inductive and historical methods. These different points of view, however, are to be regarded as complementary rather than as conflicting, although their complete synthesis must be worked out in the region of general philosophy, and not on purely ethical ground. Philosophy has thus to deal with the notions which determine the scope and character of ethical thought; and in this way it must necessarily pass from the purely speculative to the practical point of view. If it is the business of philosophy to bring into rational order the material supplied by experience, cosmical and anthropological, it cannot be without bearing on the function of man as a source of action in the world. The question, What are the ends man is naturally fitted to attain? or—if we prefer so to express it—What are the ends he ought to pursue? is not merely as natural as the question, What can a man know of the world and of himself? But the two questions are inseparably connected. To know man is to know him not only as a thinking but also as an active being; while to solve the problem of the ends of man implies knowledge both of his nature and of the sphere of his activity.

to be connected by philosophy.

Much distrust is often expressed of metaphysics. But it is not denied that the philosophy—whether

(b) Ethics necessary

to complete
philosophy

metaphysical or not—in which our most comprehensive view of the world finds its reasoned expression, cannot neglect that aspect of things in which man is related to his surroundings as a source of action. Recent ethical literature is itself a proof of this fact. In its speculative developments, both realistic and idealistic, the philosophy of the present day has made the endeavour to connect its conceptions of the world of thought and nature with the ends contemplated as to be realised in the realm of action. Whatever difficulties may be involved in the transition from the “is” to the “ought to be,” it is yet implied that the transition requires to be made, not merely in order that human activity may be shown to be rational, but that reason itself may be justified by leaving nothing outside its sphere. •

We must make no attempt, therefore, to draw a line of absolute separation between the first two of the three questions in which, as Kant says,¹ all the interests of our reason centre. The “What ought I to do?” of ethics is for ever falling back on the “What can I know?” of metaphysics. The question of practice must accordingly be treated throughout in connection with the question of knowledge. If we use Kant’s distinction between speculative and practical reason, we must always bear in mind that it is the same reason which is

¹ Werke, ed. Hartenstein (1867), iii. 532.

in one reference speculative, in another practical.¹ We are not at liberty to assume with Butler² that "morality . . . must be somewhat plain and easy to be understood: it must appeal to what we call common-sense" Nor may we presuppose, as Hutcheson did,³ that it is a subject "about which a little reflection will discover the truth." The question must be looked upon not so much as one of immediate practical as of scientific interest, and reason is to be regarded as the only court of appeal.

The form just quoted, in which Kant states the problem, is not altogether free from ambiguity. "What ought I to do?" may be taken to signify, What means should I adopt for the attainment of some end presupposed, perhaps unconsciously, as the end to be sought? But it is evident, not only that this is not what Kant himself meant by the question, but that, as thus put, it necessarily implies a further and deeper question. Not the discovery of the means, but the determination of the end itself—the end which cannot be interpreted as a mere means to some further end—is the fundamental question of ethics. It is only by misconception that this can be thought to be a trivial question. To say, as a recent scientific

2. The inquiry into the ethical end

(a) fundamental,

¹ Cf Kant, Werke, iv. 237.

² Sermons, v., towards the end.

³ Essay on the Passions and Affections, p. iv.

writer does,¹ "that happiness in one disguise or another is the end of human life is common ground for all the schools," is either to ignore what the schools have taught,² or else to use the word "happiness" merely as another name for the highest good. But, even were it still the case, as it was in the time of Aristotle, that nearly all men were agreed as to the name of the highest good, and that the common people and the cultured alike called it happiness, the difference as to what they meant by the term would still remain. To say that the ethical end is happiness is, to use Locke's terminology, a "trifling proposition"; for in so doing we merely give it a name³—and one which the controversies of philosophy have surrounded with confusion. That the end is happiness in any definite sense, for example, as the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, *may* be perfectly true, but stands very much in need of proof. That happi-

¹ W. H. Rolph, *Biologische Probleme, zugleich als Versuch zur Entwicklung einer rationellen Ethik*, 2d ed., p. 21.

² Not to mention Kant, the consistent opponent of every eudæmonistic principle, or the doctrines of a political idealist such as Mazzini (see *Life and Writings* (1867), iv. 223), reference may be made to a writer like W. K. Clifford, who looks from the scientific point of view, and yet holds that "happiness is not to be desired for its own sake"—*Lectures and Essays* (1879), ii. 121, 173.

³ "Auch dieser Begriff [Glückseligkeit] ist an sich ein bloss formaler, der jede beliebige materiale Bestimmung zulässt"—Zeller, *Ueber Begriff und Begründung der sittlichen Gesetze* (1883), p. 23

ness is the highest ethical end can be assumed as true only when "happiness" is nothing more than an abbreviated expression for "the highest ethical end."

A difficulty of a more radical kind meets us, at the very outset of our inquiry, in the distinctively ethical notion expressed by the word "ought." (b) implies a new point of view, Various attempts have been made to surmount or circumvent this difficulty, and some of these will come under consideration in the sequel. The very notion of conscious activity contains the idea of bringing about something which does not yet exist. It involves a purpose or end. The notion "ought," it is true, means more than this: it implies an obligation to pursue a definite end or conform to definite rules, regarded generally as coming from an authoritative source. In this clear and full sense, "oughtness" or duty is a comparatively recent notion, foreign to the classical period of Greek ethics. The force and definiteness belonging to the modern conception of it are due to the juridical aspect which the Stoic philosophy, Roman law, and Christian theology combined to impress upon morality. But even the notion of purpose or end implies a "preference" of the end sought: the state to be realised is looked upon as "better" or "more to be desired" than the existing state. We may ask for the reason of this superior desirableness; but the answer must soon fall back upon the assertion of something held to be desirable in it-

self. The question which we are always asking, and cannot help asking, "Why is such and such an end to be pursued by me?" or "Why ought I to follow such and such a course of conduct?" must soon lead to the assertion of an ultimate end.

transi-
to which
ures in-
igation;

This end, therefore, must not be sought for some ulterior end, nor desired as a means to satisfy any other desire. But it is still necessary to inquire into the way in which the end, held to be ultimate in a practical regard, stands related to the constitution of man and his environment. And the question to which I would draw attention, as the fundamental problem of ethics, is, What is that which men have variously called happiness, the highest good, the ethical end? or, more precisely, How can a transition be made from the notions of theoretical philosophy to the determination of that ethical end? No assumption is made, at starting, as to the nature of this end, or the manner of arriving at it. It may be a transient state of feeling, or a permanent type of character; or it may by its very nature defy exact definition,—the idea itself being perfected as its realisation is progressively approached. In any case it requires to be brought into connection with the ultimate conceptions of thought and existence.

This question of the ethical end or highest good is thus fundamental in ethical science, and upon it all other questions in ethics finally depend. But

it is easy to see that it does not cover the whole field, and that the other points of view already referred to have a legitimate application. Ethics has not only to determine the end, but to apply it to practice, and so to decide as to what is right or wrong in particular actions, and virtuous or vicious in character. And, in addition to the two questions thus implied—the question as to the ethical end, and that as to the application of it to practical affairs—there is another department of inquiry which has had a place assigned to it in most ethical systems, and which has a right to be regarded as belonging to ethics. We may investigate the place, in the individual and the community respectively, both of the sentiments and ideas and of the social institutions and customs through which morality is manifested; and this inquiry covers the twofold ground of what may be called moral psychology and moral sociology.

Of these three questions, the first forms the subject of inquiry in the following pages. It seems to me that a great part of the obscurity which surrounds ethical argument is due to confounding these different questions. It is true that no one of them is without bearing on the others; but it is none the less necessary, in discussing any one of them, to keep its distinctness from those others well in view. In inquiring into the foundation on which the ethical end is based, I do not intend to develop a code

(c) distinct
from other
ethical
questions.

of rules for practical conduct or a theory of human virtue; nor shall I attempt to trace the origin and nature of moral sentiments and ideas, or of the social institutions and customs connected with morality. If these subjects have to be introduced at all, it will be only in so far as they may be thought to decide, or tend to decide, the question more immediately in view.

(a) from inquiry into the methods of ethics

Thus it forms no part of the present inquiry to follow out the application to conduct of different ethical ends, or to exhibit the different practical systems to which different ends naturally lead. It might seem indeed, at first sight, as if the development of their practical consequences might solve the question as to the nature of the ends themselves. If we assume certain possible and *prima facie* reasonable ethical ends, and then see what codes of morality they will yield, surely (it may be thought) that one which affords the most consistent and harmonious code for the guidance of life will be the end to be sought in preference to all others. But in order that the criticism of what Professor Sidgwick has called the methods of ethics may be able to answer the question as to the end or principle of ethics, certain conditions must first be complied with. In the first place, it is necessary that the ends or principles whose applications to conduct are to be examined must not be uncritically accepted from the fluctuating morality of com-

Limitation of this inquiry

(aa) from necessity of investigating all logical alternatives,

mon-sense nor from the commonplaces of the schools, but must be shown to be "alternatives between which the human mind" is "necessarily forced to choose when it attempts to frame a complete synthesis of practical maxims, and to act in a perfectly rational manner."¹

But although this requisite is complied with, it will still remain possible, in the second place, that two or more of the assumed principles may yield systems of practical rules perfectly self-consistent, and yet inconsistent with one another.² It would be very hard indeed to show that both the theory of Egoistic Hedonism, and what is generally called Utilitarianism, do not succeed in doing so: and thus the examination of methods is not of itself sufficient to settle the question of the end of conduct. And since—to quote Mr Sidgwick³—it is "a fundamental postulate of ethics that either these methods must be reconciled and harmonised, or all but one of them rejected," it follows that the criticism of methods leads naturally up to an independent criticism of principles, unless indeed it can be shown that one method only yields a consistent code of practical rules.

(bb) from more than one self-consistent code being possible,

¹ Methods of Ethics, book i. chap. i § 5, 3d ed., p. 11.

² "The rule, 'Let every one care for me,' is quite as simple, and, in a logical point of view, defines conduct as consistently and reasonably as the rule, 'Love your neighbour as yourself'"—Leslie Stephen, Science of Ethics (1882), p. 73.

³ Methods of Ethics, I. i. 3, p. 6.

(cc) from its
assumption
that the true
end must
give per-
fectly con-
sistent rules

Even in this case, however, if it led to the adoption of the end in question, it must be borne in mind that the postulate would be implied that the true ethical end must be able to yield a consistent and harmonious system of rules for practical life. Without altogether denying this postulate, it yet seems to me that it stands in need of qualification. For in different circumstances, and at different stages of individual and social development, the application of the same ethical end may naturally produce different and conflicting courses of conduct. We must not start with any such assumption as that the rationality of the end consists in some sort of mathematical equality which ignores alike the different environment with which one age and another surround different generations, and the different functions which one individual and another have to perform in the social whole. We must leave open the possibility that what is right now may be wrong in another age; we must remember that everybody may not count for one, and that some people may count for more than one; we must admit that we may have sometimes to do to others what we would not that others should do to us. The only consistency we have a right to demand must leave room for such a variety of different conditions as to be, by itself, a very insecure guide.

From the difficulty of complying with the above

conditions, it seems practically impossible for the criticism of ethical methods to decide the question of the ethical end. Even if the application to conduct of every important end has been taken account of, we are met with the difficulty that two or more mutually antagonistic though self-consistent practical codes may probably have been developed, while we are not even justified in assuming that inability to yield a system which will fit the complex circumstances of life in a perfectly harmonious manner is sufficient ground for rejecting an end shown in some other way to be reasonable.

The last department of ethics referred to—that which has to do with the origin and nature of moral sentiments and social customs—has a bearing on the question of the end of conduct in some respects more important than the investigation of ethical methods. For, whereas the latter expressly assumes certain ends as *prima facie* reasonable, the former inquiry, on the contrary, is now frequently understood to be able, without presupposing any ethical relations whatever, to trace the way in which, from primitive feelings and customs, morality itself has been evolved. The psychological side of ethical inquiry has always had an important place with English moralists. At times, indeed, the question of the “moral faculty” has excited so much interest as to divert attention from the nature of morality itself. Moral truth has been supposed to

(β) distinct from moral psychology and sociology.

be something known and indisputable, the only question being how we came to know it. But the psychology of ethics, reinforced by the knowledge sociology gives of the development of morality, rises now to larger issues. It attempts to show the genesis of the moral from the non-moral, to account thus for the origin of ethical ideas, and even to determine what kinds of ends are to be striven after. In this way, a theory of the origin and growth of moral sentiments and institutions is made to render important help to more than one of the theories which will fall to be considered in the sequel.

3 Present
inquiry
limited

The present Essay has to inquire into the way in which we may determine what the end of human conduct is,—into the basis of ethics, therefore. But I do not propose to offer an exhaustive investigation of all the theories which have been or may be started in solution of the problem. On the contrary, I will begin by excluding from the inquiry all theories which seek the basis of ethics in something outside the constitution of man as a feeling and reasoning agent:¹ not because I contend that all

¹ The difference between Aristotle and Kant in ethics is sometimes expressed (see Trendelenburg, *Hist. Beitrage zur Phil.*, iii. 171 ff.) as if it consisted in the fact that the former investigated human nature in order to find its τέλος, whereas the latter sought the standard of action in a transcendental ground. There is reason for this distinction in Kant's manner of statement. But both may be regarded as investigating human nature.

such theories are *prima facie* unreasonable, but because it is at any rate the more obvious course to seek to determine the function of an organism by studying its inner constitution, than by having regard to something which is external to it, and does not act upon and modify it as a necessary part of its environment. It is only when this method has been tried and has failed that we should seek outside us for some guide as to the part we ought to play in the universe. For this reason I shall not take into consideration the views of the basis of ethics which find it in positive law either divine or human, except in so far as they are shown to follow from the nature of man. It is not necessary for me to deny that the source of all moral obligation may be the will of God, or the commands of the sovereign, or the opinion of society, and that the highest moral ideal may be obedience to such a rule. But theories of this kind make ethics merely an application of positive theology, or of legislation, or of social sentiment, and seem only to have an

to theories
depending
on the
human con-
stitution,

Their difference rather consists in the different position and function assigned to reason in man. It is because Kant is for the moment looking upon reason as something distinct from human nature that he says that "the ground of obligation is to be sought, not in the nature of man or in the circumstances in the world in which he is placed, but *à priori* simply in the notions of pure reason" (Werke, iv. 237). His "metaphysical" view of ethics, however, follows from the rational constitution of the human subject and his experience, and does not depend on any source that really "transcends" the reason of man.

appropriate place when we have failed to find an independent basis for action.

The question which remains to be put may be expressed in these terms: Can we find in human nature (taken either alone or in connection with its environment) any indications of the end of human conduct, or, in other words, of the principle on which human beings "ought" to act? and if so, in what direction do these indications point, and what is their significance? The answer to this question will thus necessarily depend on the view we take of the constitution of man and his relation to his environment. And I purpose to bring this discussion within the necessary limits by considering the ethical consequences of one only of the two views into which philosophical opinion is divided.

and here to
ethics of
Naturalism,

Now the fundamental principle of division in philosophical opinion lies in the place assigned to reason in human nature.¹ According to one theory, man is essentially a sensitive subject, though able to reason about his sensations—that is, to associate, compound, and compare them. He is supposed to be built up of sense-presentations associated with feelings of pleasure and pain. Recipient of external impressions which persist in idea and are accom-

¹ Opinion is also divided according to the place assigned to reason in the world,—this principle of division corresponding almost exactly with the former.

anied by pleasure or pain on his part, and thus
 allowed by other ideas and impressions, man's
 mental constitution is explained without attrib-
 uting to reason any spontaneous or productive
 action.¹ The other view differs from this in as distin-
 tributing spontaneity to reason—making it, in guished
 the way or another, the source of forms of thought, from Ration-
 principles, or ideas. The former may be called the al ethics.
 naturalistic, the latter the Rationalistic view of
 man. from that follows a Naturalistic or Natural
 ethics, from this a Rationalistic or Rational ethics.
 In both these theories, in a theoretical as well as
 an ethical aspect, the historical turn of thought
 which has characterised recent inquiry has intro-
 duced a profound modification. On the basis of Naturalism
 naturalism, we may either look upon man as an either indi-
 individual distinct from other individuals, as was vidualistic
 done by Epicurus and Hobbes and the materialists
 of the eighteenth century, or we may consider the
 man as itself an organism, apart from which the or historical
 individual is unintelligible, and look upon human
 nature as having become what it now is through a
 long process of interaction between organism and
 environment, in which social as well as psychical
 and physical facts have influenced the result. This
 is the view to the elaboration of which Comte and

Thus it is the object of Helvétius's first *discours* "De l'es-
 -" to prove that physical sensibility and memory are the only
 ductive causes of our ideas.

Darwin and Spencer have in different ways contributed.¹ What makes the historical method of importance philosophically, is not the mere fact that it traces a sequence of events in time, but the fact that, by doing so, it is able to look upon each link in the chain of events as necessarily connected with every other, and thus to regard as a system—or, rather, as an organism—what previous empirical theories had left without any principle of unity.

Rationalism
either indi-
vidualistic

A similar movement of thought has introduced a like modification into the Rationalistic theory. According to older doctrines, the individual reason is mysteriously charged with certain *à priori* principles which are to us laws of knowledge and of action; whereas the form of Rationalism which is now in the ascendant resembles the theory of natural evolution in this, that as the latter finds the race more real than the individual, and the individual to exist only in the race, so the former looks upon the individual reason as but a finite manifestation of the universal reason, and attempts to show the principles or constitutive elements of this universal reason or consciousness in their logical or necessary connection—leaving open to empirical investigation the way in which they have gradually disclosed themselves in the in-

or universal-
istic.

¹ Comte, by connecting ethics with biology; Darwin and Spencer, by the doctrine of evolution.

dividual human subject, and in the expression of the collective life of the race. Thus, as Natural Ethics is divided into an individualistic and an historical view, a similar distinction might be made in Rational Ethics, though in this case it would be more difficult to follow out the distinction in detail; and many ethical systems cannot be said to have kept consistently either to one side of it or to the other.

In the following discussion I shall investigate the ethical theory which is founded on the basis of Naturalism—working out and criticising in somewhat greater detail that form of the theory which, from the agreement it lays claim to with the results of modern science, plays so important a part in contemporary philosophical thought.

PART I.

THE INDIVIDUALISTIC THEORY.

CHAPTER II.

EGOISM.

Definition of Naturalism It is difficult to give an exact definition or even description of what I have called the "natural" view of man. Perhaps it may be best defined, negatively, as the view which denies to reason any spontaneous or creative function in the human constitution. For this definition, if it still leaves the positive description wanting, will at least make the classification into "natural" and "rational" exhaustive and mutually exclusive. At the same time it is to be noted that, on the theory of Naturalism, reason is not supposed to be excluded from all share in determining questions of conduct or the choice of ends. It would, indeed,

be impossible to have even the pretence of an ethical theory without a certain use of reason. But its function, in this case, is limited to the merely formal one of bringing different presentations (or objects) and feelings into connection, and comparing the different states of mind thus formed with one another, not with a reason-given standard.

Since the function of reason is thus restricted, and its competency to supply an end for, or principle of, action is denied, we must seek this end either in the feelings of pleasure and pain which accompany both sensory and motor presentations,—perceptions, that is to say, and actions,—or in the more complex, or apparently more complex, emotions of the mind. And the latter may either be themselves reducible to feelings of pleasure or pain accompanying presentations directly pleasurable or painful, and thence transferred by association to other presentations, or they may be regarded as somehow motives to action which may be or ought to be followed on their own account. The Individualistic Theory, therefore, is not necessarily hedonistic. It admits of a twofold view of the “natural” man: one which looks upon him as in essence a pleasure-seeking, pain-avoiding animal; another which regards him as having a variety of impulses, some of which are not directed to his own pleasure or avoidance of pain.

Psychological hedonism.

¹ Its theory
of action

The former view—psychological hedonism, as it is called—claims to be an exhaustive analysis of the motives of human conduct, perfectly general indeed, but yet valid for every case of action. It denies the possibility of a man acting from any other principle than desire of pleasure or aversion from pain. The theory is, that it is a psychological law that action is motivated by pleasure and pain, and that nothing else has motive-power over it. If, then, one pleasure (or avoidance of pain) is chosen in preference to another, it must be either by chance,—an alternative which has no ethical significance—no significance, that is, for the guidance of voluntary conduct,—or because the one course promises, or seems to promise, the attainment of a greater balance of pleasure than the other, or is actually at the time more pleasant than that other. Thus the view that pleasure is the *only* motive of human action is really identical, for ethical purposes, with the theory loosely expressed in the law that action follows the *greatest* pleasure.¹

ambiguous, I say “loosely expressed”, for the law as thus stated really admits of three quite different in-

¹ Meaning by “greatest pleasure,” greatest balance of pleasure over pain, and thus inclusive of the meaning “least pain.” It is the expression in terms of feeling of the statement sometimes preferred, that “action follows the line of least resistance”—a statement to which no exception can be taken, nor any importance allowed, till it be translated into definite psychological language.

terpretations, not always distinguished with the referring to precision which such subjects require.

(a) In the first place, the law might mean that (a) actual action always follows the course which, as a matter conse- of fact, will in the long-run bring the greatest quences of action, balance of pleasure to the agent. It is evident that there is no ground in psychology for maintaining this view. Yet it is a fair interpretation of the "law" of psychological hedonism, as commonly stated; and it is at least an admissible¹ supposition that this meaning of the phrase has not been without effect upon the uses to which the law has been put by some of its upholders. The second interpretation of the law—namely (b), or (b) its ex- that action is always in the direction which seems pected con- to the agent most likely to bring him the greatest sequences, balance of pleasure, whether it actually brings it or not—is the sense in which it appears to have been most commonly taken when expressed with any degree of accuracy. It is in this sense that—in language which ascribes greater consistency to men's conduct than it usually displays—"interest" is asserted by the author of the '*Système de la nature*' to be "the sole motive of human action."¹

¹ "Ainsi lorsque nous disons que *l'intérêt est l'unique mobile des actions humaines*, nous voulons indiquer par là que chaque homme travaille à sa manière à son propre bonheur, qu'il place dans quelqu'objet soit visible, soit caché, soit réel, soit imaginaire, et que tout le système de sa conduite tend à l'obtenir."—*Système de la nature* (1781), i. 268.

The same view is adopted by Bentham;¹ and both James Mill and John Stuart Mill identify desire with pleasure, or an "idea" of pleasure, in terms which are sufficiently sweeping, if not very carefully weighed;² while the will is said to follow desire, or only to pass out of its power when coming under the sway of habit.³ Still another meaning may, however, be given to the "law" of psychological hedonism, according to which the doubtful reference to the manifold pleasures and pains, contemplated as resulting from an action, is got rid of, and (c) the agent is asserted always to

or (c) its

¹ "On the occasion of every act he exercises, every human being is led to pursue that line of conduct which, according to his view of the case taken by him at the moment, will be in the highest degree contributory to his own greatest happiness"—Constitutional Code, book i § 2; Works, ix 5 The continued existence of the species is, Bentham thinks, a conclusive proof of this proposition

² Thus, according to James Mill, "the terms 'idea of pleasure' and 'desire' are but two names; the thing named, the state of consciousness is one and the same. The word Desire is commonly used to mark the idea of a pleasurable sensation when the future is associated with it."—Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind, J S Mill's edit, ii. 192, cf. Fragment on Mackintosh (1835), p. 389 f To the same effect J. S. Mill says "Desiring a thing and finding it pleasant, aversion to it and thinking of it as painful, are phenomena entirely inseparable, or rather two parts of the same phenomenon, in strictness of language, two different modes of naming the same psychological fact."—Utilitarianism, 7th ed, p. 58.

³ "Will is the child of desire, and passes out of the dominion of its parent only to come under that of habit."—Utilitarianism, p 60.

choose that action or forbearance which is actually most pleasant, or least painful, to him at the time—taking account, of course, of imaginative pleasures and pains, as well as of those which are immediately connected with the senses. It is in this interpretation of its law that psychological hedonism seems to be most capable of defence, and in this sense it has been more than once stated and defended.¹

The ethics of the form of Naturalism which is now under examination must be inferred from the “law” that human action follows the greatest

present
character-
istics.

2 Ethical
inferences
from this
theory,

¹ Thus Jonathan Edwards says. “When I say that the Will is as the greatest apparent good, or (as I have explained it) that volition has always for its object the thing which appears most agreeable, it must be carefully observed, to avoid confusion and needless objection, that I speak of the *direct* and immediate object of the act of volition, and not some object to which the act of will has only an indirect and remote respect”—On the Freedom of the Will, part i § 2; Works, i 133 The matter is put still more clearly by the late Alfred Barratt. “Action does not always follow knowledge Of course not. but the doctrine [Hedonism] does not require that it should; for it says, not that we follow what *is* our greatest possible pleasure, or what we know or ‘think’ to be so, but what at the moment of action is most desired.”—Mind, vol. ii. 173; cf. Physical Ethics, p. 52 ff. So Mr Stephen, Science of Ethics, p. 47: “It is more accurate to say that my conduct is determined by the pleasantest judgment, than to say that it is determined by my judgment of what is pleasantest” The negative side of the same view was expressed by Locke in his doctrine that action is moved by the most pressing uneasiness (Essay, II. xxi. 29, 31), and distinguished by him from the former view (*b*), that the “greater visible good” is the motive (II. xxi 35, 44).

pleasure, in one or other of the above meanings which that law admits of. The law is the datum or premiss from which we are to advance to an ethical conclusion. The "right" is to be evolved from the pleasurable; and the pleasurable, consequently, cannot be made to depend upon the right. It is certainly true of the conduct of most men, "that our prospect of pleasure resulting from any course of conduct may largely depend on our conception of it as right or otherwise."¹ But this presupposes that there is a right independent of one's own pleasure, and therefore does not apply to an ethics based on the simple theory of human nature put forward by psychological hedonism.

(a) in its first
meaning,

It is scarcely necessary to discuss the first alternative (a), as no psychologist would seriously maintain it. A society composed of men constituted in the way it supposes men to be constituted, would be a collection of rational egoists, omniscient in all that concerned the results of action, and each adopting unerringly at every moment the course of conduct which would increase his own pleasure the most. The conduct of any member of such a society could only be modified when—and would always be modified when—the modified conduct actually brought pleasurable results to the agent: never so as to make him prefer the public good to his own. The second alternative (b) admits of

(b) in its

¹ Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 3d ed., p. 40.

uch modification taking place only when it seems ^{second meaning} to the individual that this modified action will produce a greater balance of pleasure or smaller balance of pain than any other course of action. Under this theory an individual might indeed prefer the public good or another man's good to his own, but only through his being deceived as to the actual results of his course of action. Ethics determining an end for conduct is put out of court, though the statesman or the educator may modify the actions of others by providing appropriate motives. If the "two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure," "determine what we shall do," it is hardly necessary for them also "to point out what we ought to do."¹ The end is already given in the nature of action, though an enlightened understanding will teach men how the greatest

¹ Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chap i, Works,

1 With this statement may be compared the assertion of Helvétius: "Il semble que, dans l'univers moral comme dans l'univers physique, Dieu n'est mis qu'un seul principe dans tous les hommes. . . . Il semble qu'il ait dit pareillement à l'homme. . . . Je te mets sous la garde du plaisir et de la douleur: l'un et l'autre veilleront à tes pensées, à tes actions; engendreront tes passions, exciteront tes aversions, tes amitiés, tes tendresses, tes fureurs; allumeront tes desirs, tes craintes, tes espérances, te dévoileront des vérités; te plongeront dans des erreurs; et après t'avoir fait enfanter mille systèmes absurdes et opposés de morale et de législation, te découvriront un jour les principes simples, au développement desquels est attaché l'ordre et le bonheur du monde moral."—*De l'esprit*, III. ix, *Œuvres* (ed. of 1818), i. 293.

private
ethics and
legislation,

balance of pleasure may be obtained. We can only get at a rule prescribing an end by changing our point of view from the individual to the state. It is best for the state that each individual should aim at the common happiness; but, when we talk of this as a moral duty for the individual, all we can mean is that the state will punish a breach of it. In the words of Helvétius,¹ "pain and pleasure are the bonds by which we can always unite personal interest to the interest of the nation. . . . The sciences of morals and legislation can be only deductions from this simple principle." According to Bentham's psychology, a man is necessitated by his mental and physical nature to pursue at every moment, not the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but what seems to him his own greatest happiness. And what the legislator has to do is, by judiciously imposed rewards and punishments, especially the latter, to make it for the greatest happiness of each to pursue the greatest happiness of all.² As distinguished from this "art of legislation," "private ethics" consists only of prudential rules prescribing the best means to an end predetermined by nature as the only possible end of human action: it "teaches how each man may

¹ De l'homme, concl. gén., Œuvres, ii. 608.

² Cf. *Système de la nature*, i. 120: "La politique devrait être l'art de régler les passions des hommes et de les diriger vers le bien de la société."

dispose himself to pursue the course most conducive to his own happiness.”¹ The consequences to the theory of action of the third alternative (c) are similar: it only states the law with more appearance of psychological accuracy. If a man always follows that course of action which will give him at the time the greatest (real and imaginative) satisfaction, it is impossible for us to infer from his nature an ethical law prescribing some other end, without admitting a fundamental contradiction in human nature; while to say that he ought to seek the end he always does and cannot help seeking, is unnecessary and even unmeaning. Modification of character may of course be still brought about, since the kinds of action in which an individual takes pleasure may be varied almost indefinitely. But the motive made use of in this educative process must be personal pleasure; and the end the legislator has in view in his work must be the same,² though it is often quietly assumed that for him personal pleasure has become identified with the wider interests of the community.

The different significations of which it admits show that the psychological law that action follows the greatest pleasure is by no means so clear as it may at first sight appear. Probably it is the very

(c) in its
third
meaning

Result of
this ambi-
guity,

¹ Bentham, *op cit.*, chap. xix. (xvii. in the reprint of 1879), § 20; Works, i. 148.

² Cf. Bentham, Works, ix. 5.

ambiguity of the law that has made it appear to provide a basis for an ethical system. When it is said that greatest pleasure is the moral end of action, this "greatest pleasure" is looked upon as the greatest possible balance of pleasurable over painful states for the probable duration of life. on the egoistic theory, of the life of the individual; on the utilitarian theory, of the aggregate lives of all men or even of all sentient beings. But when it is said that greatest pleasure is, as a matter of fact, always the motive of action, it is obvious that "greatest pleasure" has changed its signification. For if the same meaning were kept to, not only would the psychological law as thus stated be openly at variance with facts, but its validity would render the moral precept unnecessary. It is even unmeaning to say that a man "ought" to do that which he always does and cannot help doing.¹ On the other hand, if the double meaning of the phrase had been clearly stated, we should at once have seen the hiatus in the proof of egoistic hedonism—the gap between the present (or apparent) pleasure for which one does act, and the greatest pleasure of a lifetime for which one ought to act—as well as the additional difficulty of passing

ethical
hedonism.

¹ Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, I. iv. 1, 3d ed., p. 41; cf. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 9: "To a being who is simply a result of natural forces, an injunction to conform to their laws is unmeaning"

from egoism to utilitarianism. If greatest apparent pleasure—or greatest present pleasure—is by an inexorable law of human nature always sought, how can it be shown that we ought to sacrifice the apparent to the real—the present pleasure that is small to the greater future pleasure? If the individual necessarily pursues his own pleasure, how can we show that he ought to subordinate it to the pleasures of the “greatest number”?

It is a matter of fact, however, that the psychol- 3 Transition
ogists who maintain that action follows the great- from psycho-
est pleasure—meaning by that, greatest apparent logical to
or greatest present pleasure—have in their ethics ethical
made the transition to an enlightened Egoism, or hedonism
even to Utilitarianism. The nature of the transi- Right action
tion thus requires to be more clearly pointed out. will imply

If the former interpretation of the law of psycho-
logical hedonism could be accepted, and a man's
motive for action were always what seemed to
him likely to bring him the greatest pleasure on
the whole, ethics—what Bentham calls private
ethics—could be reduced (as Bentham finally re-
duces it) to certain maxims of prudence. To be
fully acquainted with the sources of pleasure and
pain, and to estimate them correctly, would imply
possession of the highest (egoistic) morality. If
men could be made to think rightly as to what
their greatest pleasure consisted in, then right
action on their part—that is to say, the pursuit of

(a) correct
estimate of
conse-
quences of
action,

their greatest pleasure—would (according to Bentham's psychology) follow as a matter of course. Right conduct, however, is not so purely an affair of the intellect as this would make it. Indeed, Bentham's psychological assumption requires only to be plainly stated for its inconsistency with the facts of human action to become apparent. The "*video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*" expresses too common an experience to be so easily explained away. The impulses by which action is governed are not always in accordance with what the intellect decides to be best on a survey of the whole life and its varied chances. In judging the consequences of action, a future good is compared with a present, regardless of the mere difference of time by which they are separated. But the springs which move the will are often at variance with the decisions of the understanding, and many men are unable to resist the strength of the impulse to act for the pleasure of the moment, though they foresee that a greater future satisfaction would follow from present self-denial.

) and corresponding
strength of
feeling

It would seem, then, that the facts of experience are sufficient to show that a man's conduct does not always follow the course which he thinks likely to bring him the greatest pleasure on the whole. But the view that a man always acts for what is most pleasant—or least painful—at the time cannot be dismissed so easily. It is not enough simply

to point to the facts of human action in order to show that this hypothesis is inconsistent with them. If we instanced the self-restraint in which so many pass their lives from day to day, it might perhaps be answered that there is a persistent idea of duty, or love of reputation, or fear of social stigma, the repression of which would be more painful than the restraint it puts upon other impulses. Even the martyr who deliberately parts with life itself for the sake of an ideal, may be said to choose death as the least painful course open to him at the time. It should be borne in mind, however, that Professor Bain, the most thorough psychologist of Bentham's school, refuses to admit his line of defence for psychological hedonism, and holds that, in actions such as those referred to, men are really carried out of the circle of their self-regarding desires.¹ But my present purpose is not to discuss the merits of any such psychological theory, but rather to investigate its ethical consequences. And for this purpose the question requires to be put, how a passage is effected from psychological hedonism to an egoistic—and even a utilitarian—theory of ethics.

If a man always acts for his greatest present pleasure, real and imaginary, it seems a far step to say that he "ought" to act—or in any way to expect that he will act—at each moment for the

The postulate that action can be rationalised

¹ Cf. *The Emotions and the Will*, 3d ed., p. 293 ff.

involves
these con-
ditions,

greatest sum of pleasure attainable in the probable duration of his life. But on reflection, this may turn out to follow if we postulate that conduct can be rationalised. What is meant by this egoistic "ought" may be said to be simply that to the eye of reason the pleasure of any one moment cannot be regarded as more valuable than the equal pleasure of any other moment, if it is equally certain; and that therefore to act as if it were is to act unreasonably. Man fails in acting up to reason in this sense, because his action is not motivated by reason, but directly by pleasure and pain; and not by a mere estimate of pleasure and pain, but by pleasure and pain themselves. The psychological hedonist must maintain that the estimates of future pleasure and pain only become motives by being not merely recognised (intellectually) but felt (emotionally)—that is, by themselves becoming pleasurable or painful. If the Egoist calls any action irrational, it cannot be because the motive which produced it was not the greatest pleasure in consciousness at the time. It can only be on the ground that the greatest pleasure in consciousness at the time is likely to lead to a sacrifice of greater pleasure in the future; and this must be due either to intellectual misapprehension or to the imagined fruition of future pleasure not being strong enough to outweigh the pleasure which comes from a present stimulus, and to the imagined

fruition of the more distant being weaker than that of the less distant pleasure. It is owing to a defect of the imagination on a man's part that even with complete information he does not act "up to his lights"—irrational action being partly a consequence of insufficient acquaintance with the normal results of conduct, partly due to defective imagination. Were a man's imagination of future pleasure and pain as strong as his experience of present pleasure and pain, and did he correctly appreciate the results of his conduct, then his action would, of psychological necessity, harmonise with the precepts of egoistic hedonism.

Egoistic hedonism may therefore, in a certain sense, be said to be a "reasonable" end of conduct on the theory of psychological hedonism, it is the end which will be made his own by that ideally perfect man whose intellect can clearly see the issues of conduct, and whose imagination of the future causes of sensibility is so vivid that the pleasure or pain got from anticipating them is as great as if they were present, or only less lively in proportion as there is a risk of their not being realised. Conversely it would seem that only that man can act "reasonably" in whom imagination of pleasure (or of pain) is already of equal strength with the actual experience of it. But, if the "pleasures of the imagination" are as strong as those of sense or of reality, the latter obviously become

the latter of
which

superfluous; and it follows that the ideally perfect man is left without any motive to aim at the real thing, since he can obtain as much pleasure by imagining it. The cultured hedonist must, it would seem, be able to—

“ Hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus,
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
By bare imagination of a feast ”

is inconsistent with
the nature
of voluntary
action

So far as feeling or motive to action goes, no difference must exist for him between reality and imagination. And thus, although we may admit that, on this psychological basis, conduct when rationalised agrees with that prescribed by egoistic hedonism, yet it can only be rationalised by a development of the strength of the imagination, which would make the feeling which it brings with it as strong as that which accompanies a real object, and hence take away the motive for the pursuit of the latter. The discrepancy between representation and presentation which is necessary for the state of desire,¹ is no longer present. Hedonism vindicates its rationality only on conditions which imply the futility of action altogether. It is not merely that the attainment of the hedonistic end in practical conduct implies a strength of imagination of which no one is capable, but the conditions of

¹ Cf Sully, *Outlines of Psychology*, p. 577. .

acting both rationally and hedonistically, are conditions which would paralyse all activity.

The foregoing argument may perhaps be objected to on two grounds. On the one hand, it may be said that it ignores the vast complexity of human motive, and treats action as if it were a simple and abstract thing. On the other hand, we may be reminded of the fact that, while all men act for pleasure, the moral quality of their conduct does not depend on this fact, but on the *kind* of things in which they take pleasure.

4. Possible objections to preceding argument

So far as the first objection is concerned, it seems to me that the fault belongs to the psychological theory of human action, the ethical consequences of which are under investigation. It is this theory which asserts that, however interwoven the threads of impulse, aversion, and habit may be, their most complex relations can be reduced to the formula, 'greatest pleasure, or least pain, prevails.' It is not necessary, indeed, that every action should be the conscious pursuit of a pleasurable object already before the mind in idea. But the theory, if consistently carried out, implies that the action which follows in the line of a previously formed habit, does so because the discomfort or pain of breaking through the habit would be sufficient to counter-balance any satisfaction that might result. The objection, therefore, of excessive simplicity or "abstractness," is one which cannot have greater force

(a) complexity of motive, but it is psychological hedonism which ignores this.

than when urged against the theory of psychological hedonism.

(b) difference in kind of pleasurable objects, Further—and this is the second objection—the above analysis may be considered by some not to have taken sufficient account of the difference in the objects in which a human being can take pleasure, and of the fact that the moral quality of men differs, not according as they act for pleasure or not, but according to the kind of actions and sufferances in which they find pleasure. There can be no doubt of the importance of this distinction for questions of practical morals. The man in whom “selfishness takes the shape of benevolence,” as it did in Bentham, is infinitely better than the man in whom it retains the form of selfishness. But the consideration is important just because it goes on the implied assumption that the hedonistic is not the chief aspect of conduct, and that there is a difference between courses of action more fundamental than the pleasurable or painful feeling attendant on them. If the principles on which the objection is founded were consistently adhered to and followed out, they would make not pleasure, but something else—that, namely, by which pleasures differ from one another in kind—the ethical standard. But if, in ultimate analysis, it is the pleasure felt or expected that moves to action, it would seem that there is no way in which the conclusion of the preceding argument can be avoided. If pleasure is

but this involves a reference to something else than pleasure,

the motive, it must be *quâ* pleasure—that is to say, either the greatest apparent pleasure, or the greatest present pleasure, is the motive. If difference of quality be admitted, we are introducing a determining factor other than pleasure. Certain kinds of pleasure may be better than others for the race or for the state. But these differences must be reducible to terms of individual pleasure admitting of purely quantitative comparisons, before they become motives to action.¹ From the point of view of the whole, we may say that one action leads to a greater sum of pleasure than another. But, in judging the action of individuals, all that we can say of it is, that to one man one class of actions gives pleasure, to another another: each man is equally following the course of action which either (*a*) will bring, or (*b*) seems to him likely to bring, the greatest pleasure, or (*c*) is actually most pleasant at the time. From the nature of the individual we can evolve no end beyond egoistic hedonism. And even this end can only be made his at each occurrence of action (assuming the first alternative (*a*) to be incorrect) by enlightening his intellect so that (*b*) will correspond with the actual greatest pleasure, or by also

which psychological hedonism does not admit of

¹ Cf. J. Grote, 'Utilitarian Philosophy,' p. 20, note: "One kind of pleasure may be, systematically, to be preferred to another, but it must be because the pleasures classified under it generally exceed those under the other in intensity, or some other of the elements of value."

enlivening his imagination of future pleasures and pains so that (*c*) will correspond with it; and this, as has been shown, could only be effected under conditions which are inconsistent with the principles of human action.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRANSITION TO UTILITARIANISM.

It still remains possible, of course, to fix an ethical end in some other way than by studying individual human nature. We may, for instance, looking from the point of view of the community, fix its greatest happiness, instead of his own, as the individual's end. But the difficulty then arises of persuading the individual—or, indeed, making it possible for him—to regard this impersonal goal as the end of his conduct. For this purpose, Bentham seemed to look to the exercise of administrative control which, by a system of rewards and punishments, will make the greatest happiness of the individual coincide so far as possible with that of the community.¹ J. S. Mill, on the other hand, with his eyes turned to the

¹ Different
standpoints
of individual
and state

¹ Professor Bain distinguishes with greater clearness than his predecessors, first, legal duty, or that the contravention of which is punished by the ministers of the state; secondly, moral duty, enforced by the unofficial punishment of social disapprobation; and thirdly, the conduct which society leaves to individual choice, without censuring either its commission or omission. Moral duty is further distinguished by him from the meritorious, or conduct

subjective springs of action, saw in the gradual growth of sympathetic pleasures and pains the means by which an individual's desires would cease to conflict with those of his neighbours.

It is in some such way that the transition is made from Egoism to Utilitarianism. The transition is made. Bentham and his school are an evidence of the fact. But it is not therefore logical. It is, indeed, important to notice that we only pass from the one theory to the other by changing our original individualistic point of view. Having already fixed an end for conduct regardless of the difference between the individual at the time of acting and at subsequent times, we proceed to take the much longer step of ignoring the difference between the agent and other individuals. The question is no longer, What is good or desirable for the person who is acting? but, What is best on the whole for all those whom his action may affect—that is to say, for the community?

cannot be
logically
connected

But while it is comparatively easy to see how this transition is effected as a matter of fact, it is difficult to establish any logical connection between its different stages, or to offer any considerations fitted to convince the individual that it is reasonable for him to seek the happiness of the community rather than his own. Only that conduct, it

which society encourages by approval, without censuring its omission

may seem, can be reasonable which directs and perfects the natural striving of each organism towards its own pleasure. We may, of course, let our point of view shift from the individual to the social "organism." And in this case, if the "natural" end of each human being is his own greatest pleasure, the end of the community, or organised body of pleasure-seekers, will naturally be concluded to be the greatest aggregate pleasure of its members. Thus, if we can hypostatise the community, and treat it as an individual with magnified but human wants and satisfactions, then, for this leviathan, the ethical end will correspond to what is called Utilitarianism or Universalistic Hedonism. But, when we remember that the community is made up of units distinct from one another in feeling and action, the difficulty arises of establishing it as the natural end, or as a reasonable end, for each of these units to strive after the greatest pleasure of all. For it is evident that the pursuit of the greatest aggregate pleasure may often interfere with the attainment by the individual of his own greatest pleasure. On the other hand, the self-seeking action of the individual may no doubt lead to a loss of pleasure on the whole; but then it is not his own pleasure that is lost, only other people's. To the outsider—as to the community—it may seem irrational that a small increase in the pleasure of one unit should be allowed at the expense of a loss of greater pleas-

through
analogy of
state to in-
dividual.

Difference
between
one's own
pleasure and
the pleasure
of others

ure on the part of other units. But it seems irrational only because the outsider naturally puts himself in the place of the community; and neither takes account of the fact that to the individual agent there is a fundamental difference between his own pleasure and any one else's pleasure: for him the former is, and the latter is not, pleasure at all.¹

overlooked
in arguing

This fundamental difference seems to be overlooked when the attempt is made to argue logically

¹ Mr Gurney's attempt (Mind, vii 349 ff) to rationalise the utilitarian "ought" depends upon the assumption that the individual feels a desire (not only for his own, but) for other people's pleasure (p 352). From the point of view of the psychological hedonist, however, this desire is only secondary and derivative, depending upon the fact that it increases the pleasure of the subject. "Your pleasure," the psychological hedonist would say, "is desired by me *quod* my pleasure." If, on the other hand, it is admitted that the individual has other ends than his own pleasure, there seems no ground in psychological fact for limiting these ends to something aimed at because pleasurable to others. From this point of view the first step in the establishment of an ethical theory would be an attempt to find a principle of unity in the various ends actually aimed at by individuals, and recognised by them as "good." This is made by Professor Sidgwick, who, while allowing that "it is possible to hold that the objective relations of conscious minds which we call cognition of Truth, contemplation of Beauty, Freedom of action, &c., are good, independently of the pleasures that we derive from them," maintains that "we can only justify to ourselves the importance that we attach to any of these objects by considering its conduciveness, in one way or another, to the happiness of conscious (or sentient) beings" (Methods of Ethics, iii xiv. 3, 3d ed., p 398). But Mr Sidgwick's Utilitarianism depends on a Rational view of human nature which is beyond the scope of the present discussion. See below, p 74.

from egoistic psychology (or even from egoistic ethics) to utilitarianism. Indeed, the hiatus in logical proof is often only concealed by a confusion of standpoints; and J. S. Mill, while emphasising the distinction between modern Utilitarianism and the older Epicureanism, has even allowed his official "proof" of utilitarianism—such proof, that is, as he thinks the principle of Utility, to be susceptible of—to rest on the ambiguity between individual and social happiness.

from egoism
to utilitari-
anism.

This ambiguity does not seem to have been consistently avoided even by Bentham. For the most part, indeed, nothing can exceed the clearness with which he recognises the twofold and possibly conflicting interests involved in almost every action. There is the interest of the agent, and the interest of others whom his action may affect. And he also holds that, in the case of divergence of interests, the individual will act for his own. "The happiness of the individuals," he says,¹ "of whom a community is composed,—that is, their pleasures and their security,—is the end, and the sole end, which the legislator ought to have in view—the sole standard in conformity to which each individual ought, as far as depends upon the legislator, to be *made* to fashion his conduct. But whether it be this or anything else that is to be *done*, there

2. Con-
nection between
egoism and
utilitarian-
ism accord-
ing to Ben-
tham

¹ Principles of Morals and Legislation, chap. iii § 1; Works, i. 14.

is nothing by which a man can ultimately be *made* to do it, but either pain or pleasure"—that is, of course, his own pain or pleasure. Here, then, ethical Utilitarianism and psychological Egoism are both plainly involved. A man, it is said, can only pursue general happiness by its being identical with his own happiness. And as it is evident, and admitted, that these two happinesses often diverge in the courses of action naturally leading to them, a man can only be beneficent, rather than selfish, through some artificial arrangement which makes beneficence to be for his interest:¹ in plain language (since rewards are only of exceptional applicability), through his being punished for not being beneficent.² But, as Bentham clearly shows, many cases of action cannot be safely touched by the legislator's art. Such cases "unmeet for punishment" include not only the actions which are beneficial or neutral in their results, but also actions hurtful to the community, though they may elude such vigilance as the state can contrive, or their restraint by punishment inflicted by the

(α) Utilitarianism not a political duty,

¹ As Paley put it, with characteristic plainness of statement, "We can be obliged to nothing, but what we ourselves are to gain or lose something by"—*Moral and Political Philosophy*, book ii. chap. ii.

² Cf. Bain, *Emotions*, p. 264: "I consider that the proper meaning or import of these terms [Morality, Duty, Obligation, or Right] refers to the class of actions enforced by the sanction of *punishment*."

state may constitute a greater evil than the offence.¹ *Probity* may be exacted by the "persons stated and *certain*" who happen to be political superiors: except in rare instances, positive *beneficence* can not. Utilitarian conduct, therefore, is not a "political duty," because it is not fully enforced by definite punishment. The "art of legislation" is indeed said to teach "how a multitude of men, composing a community, may be disposed to pursue that course which upon the whole is the most conducive to the happiness of the whole community, by means of motives to be applied by the legislator."² But the means here indicated are such as cannot fully compass the attainment of the end. For the motives applied by the legislator either cannot reach a large part of the extra-regarding conduct of individuals, or could only reach it by entailing greater evils than those they would be used to prevent.

But if utilitarian conduct is not a political duty, ^{(b) nor a moral duty,} it may seem evident that it is at least a moral duty. Now a moral duty is said by Bentham³ to

¹ Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chap. xix. (xvii.), § 9 ff., Works, i. 144 ff.

² *Ibid.*, § 20, p. 148

³ *Fragment on Government*, chap. v., * Works, i. 293. Cf. *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ch. iii. § 5, p. 14, where the Moral Sanction is said to proceed from "such *chance* persons in the community as the person in question may happen in the course of his life to have concerns with"

be "created by a kind of motive which, from the *uncertainty* of the *persons* to apply it, and of the *species* and *degree* in which it will be applied, has hardly yet got the name of punishment: by various mortifications resulting from the ill-will of persons *uncertain* and *variable*,—the community in general; that is, such individuals of that community as he whose duty is in question shall happen to be connected with." In plain language, then, moral duty simply means the ill-will of a man's neighbours which follows his conduct in so far as that conduct affects them disagreeably. Such ill-will on the part of a man's neighbours may result from success or from failure on his part, from a breach of etiquette, from refusal to sacrifice to the caprice of those neighbours the wider good of the society whom his conduct affects (but to whom it may be unknown), from deception or from telling the truth. In a word, the duty—that is, the punishment—is entirely uncertain: not only as regards the persons applying it, its nature and its amount, but also as regards the kind of actions to which it applies. They will be actions unpleasant to the people who inflict the punishment, but not necessarily hurtful to the common weal. since the immediate effects of an action are easily recognised, while its wider and more lasting consequences are neither so apparent nor appeal so surely to the interest of those who are cognisant of the action and immediately

affected by it. Moral duty, therefore, as Bentham defines it, depending on, or rather identical with, the ill-will of one's neighbours, is indefinite and limited in its nature, and can command or sanction no such definite and wide-reaching rule for conduct as that a man should always act for the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people whom his action may affect. Utilitarian conduct, therefore, is neither a political duty nor a moral duty; nor does Bentham follow Paley in insisting upon it as a religious duty "created by punishment, by punishment expected at the hands of a person *certain*—the Supreme Being." And "if he persists in asserting it to be a duty—but without meaning it to be understood that it is on any one of these three accounts that he looks upon it as such—all he then asserts is his own internal *sentiment*; all he means then is that he feels himself *pleased* or *displeased* at the thoughts of the point of conduct in question, but without being able to tell *why*. In this case he should e'en say so; and not seek to give an undue influence to his own single suffrage, by delivering it in terms that purport to declare the voice either of God, or of the law, or of the people."¹

(c) nor insisted on as a religious duty,

This plain piece of advice which Bentham gives to Blackstone is not often neglected by himself. The motive, he once said, of his own exceptional

¹ Bentham, Fragment on Government, *loc. cit.*

(d) nor sufficiently motivated in private ethics,

devotion to the interests of the community was that it pleased him. "I am a selfish man," he wrote, "as selfish as any man can be. But in me, somehow or other, so it happens, selfishness has taken the shape of benevolence."¹ But when the matter is thus brought back from the regions of political, moral, and religious duty, to the individual ground of "private ethics," we have still to refer to Bentham's own discussion of the question, "What motives (independent of such as legislation and religion may chance to furnish) can one man have to consult the happiness of another?"² Bentham at once replies—and indeed the answer on his principles is obvious enough—that there is no motive which always continues *adequate*. But yet there are, he says, "no occasions in which a man has not some motives for consulting the happiness of other men." Such are "the purely-social motive of sympathy or benevolence," and "the semi-social motives of love of amity and love of reputation." A man is directly moved to promote the happiness of others through the sympathetic feelings which make the happiness of others in some degree pleasurable to himself; and he is indirectly moved to promote their happiness through his desire of their friendship and good opinion. So far, therefore, it is quite true that "private ethics"—or what Ben-

¹ Works, xi. 95; cf J Grote, *Utilitarian Philosophy*, p. 137.

² *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ch. xix. (xvii.), § 7 ff.

tham regards as such—"concerns every member—that is, the happiness and the actions of every member of any community that can be proposed."¹ It certainly concerns their happiness, but only in so far as this is a means to the happiness of the agent. So that when Bentham says that "there is no case in which a private man ought not to direct his own conduct to the production of his own happiness and of that of his fellow-creatures," he should rather say that a man will² only direct his conduct to the happiness of his fellow-creatures in so far as such action leads to his own happiness. Private ethics, therefore, has to do with the happiness of others only so far as this reacts on the happiness of self; or, as Bentham ultimately defines it, in terms to which no exception can be taken: "Private ethics teaches how each man may dispose himself to pursue the course most conducive to his own happiness by means of such motives as offer of themselves."³

which can
be reduced
to pru-
dence.

Under Bentham's hands "private ethics" is thus reduced to prudence, at the same time that the author has failed to show why the general happi-

³ Ben-
tham's treat-
ment ex-
haustive

¹ *Loc. cit*, § 8, p. 144.

² "Ought" is inappropriate here according to Bentham's principles, since there is no question of punishment inflicted by a political or social or religious superior.

³ *Loc. cit*, § 20, p. 148.

om his
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iew.

ness is to be aimed at by the individual as a religious or political or moral duty. Nor is this failure due to any lack of skill in following out the consequences which his premisses involved. The arguments used against him have thus an equally valid application to all who adopt the same general line of thought. For Bentham appears to have seen as clearly as any of his disciples the difficulty of bringing the egoistic basis of his theory of human nature into harmony with the universal reference required by his ethics. And the criticism already offered of the way in which Bentham attempts to bring about this connection may be shown not to be restricted to his special way of putting the case.

It is necessary to remember that throughout this chapter we are looking from the individual's point of view, and inquiring how far it is possible to work from it in the direction of utilitarianism. Now it is admitted that, in pursuing his own happiness, he is sometimes led, and may be led on the whole, to neglect the general happiness. A sufficient reason for following the latter—or an obligation to do it—can therefore only come either from the supreme power or from one's fellow-men, and from the latter either as organised in the State, and expressing themselves by its constituted authorities, or else by the vaguer method of social praise and blame. Bentham's classification of the possible sources or kinds of duty into religious, political,

and moral [or social], is therefore a natural consequence of the individualistic system.

The first of these possible sources of duty is indeed only mentioned by Bentham, and then passed by. And yet it might seem that the religious sanction is a more efficient motive-power than the social, while it applies to regions of conduct which legal enactment cannot reach. Without question, the operation of such a motive is capable of bringing egoistic conduct into harmony with utilitarianism, or with any other principle of action to which the sanction may be attached. “Private happiness is our motive, and the will of God our rule,” says Paley,¹ and in this case such conduct will be obligatory as the rule may arbitrarily determine; while, whatever it may be, there will be a strong enough motive to follow it. The whole fabric of a moral philosophy such as Paley’s, therefore, rests on two theological propositions—that God has ordained the general happiness as the rule of human conduct, and that He will punish in another life those who disregard that rule. The basis of morality is laid in a divine command enforced by a divine threat. Perhaps it will be generally agreed that Bentham acted wisely in not laying stress on this application of the “religious sanction.” Even those least inclined to theological agnosticism would reject any such rough-and-ready solution of the

(a) The religious sanction,

relied on by Paley,

¹ Moral and Political Philosophy, book ii. chap. iii

inverts the relation between ethics and theology.

problem which deals with the relation of morality to the divine nature. Paley's method of treatment, they would say, inverts the relation in which theism stands to morality. The divine will cannot be thus arbitrarily connected with the moral law. It can be conceived to approve and sanction such an object as the happiness of mankind only when God is first of all regarded as a moral being, and the happiness of mankind as an object of moral action. If any relation of consequence can be asserted between them, the general happiness is to be regarded as a moral duty first, and only afterwards as a religious duty.

(b) Limits of the political sanction

When he comes to the political sanction, Bentham's treatment wants nothing in respect of fullness, and even those who do not agree with his estimate of the infelicitic character of many existing institutions and enactments will admit that even the best-intentioned legislator cannot make utilitarian conduct a political duty. We must bear in mind here, also, the effect which individual desires and opinions have not only on social judgments, but also on statute-law. In arguing on the relation of the individual to the State, we are too ready to forget that the State is represented by a legislator or body of legislators, and that we can never assume that in their cases private interest has already become identified with the larger interests of the community.¹ For were this the case, the accusation

¹ This is clearly recognised by Bentham: "The *actual* end [as

of class-legislation or private interest would not be heard so often as it is.

A modern disciple of Bentham would thus be compelled, just as Bentham himself was, to make utilitarianism neither a political nor religious but a "moral" duty, enforced by and founded on the shifting and uncertain punishments or sanctions of society—what Professor Bain describes as "the unofficial expressions of disapprobation and the exclusion from social good offices."¹ But as a logical proof of utilitarianism, this means is, if possible, weaker than the preceding, for social opinion, though of somewhat wider applicability than legal enactment, has probably been, for the most part, in even less exact correspondence than it with the general happiness. The social sanction is strict on indifferent points of etiquette, does not consult the general interests of mankind on points of honour, and is lenient towards acts that the utilitarian moralist condemns.²

(c) Uncertainty of the social sanction,

distinguished from the right and proper end] of government is," he says, "in every political community, the greatest happiness of those, whether one or many, by whom the powers of government are exercised"—Constitutional Code, book i., Introd., § 2; Works, ix. 5.

¹ The Emotions and the Will, p. 264.

² Cf. Bain, The Emotions and the Will, p. 287. Professor Bain says (Emotions, p. 276 n.), "we ought to have a written code of public morality, or of the duties imposed by society, over and above what parliament imposes, and this should not be a loosely written moral treatise, but a strict enumeration of what

(d) and of the internal sanction so far as a result of the social.

Professor Bain, however, advances from the external disapprobation to an internal sanction—looking upon conscience as one of the powers which inflicts punishment, and lies at the source of the feeling of obligation. But if conscience is only “an ideal resemblance of public authority, growing up in the same individual mind, and working to the same end,” it can, as little as its archetype, point to the maxim of utilitarianism. According to Professor Bain, it is through this sentiment—at first a mere imitation of external authority—that the individual becomes a law to himself, on recognising the utilities that led to the imposition of the law.¹ But on this theory, in so far as conscience continues to point to the conduct impressed upon it by its external pattern, it fails to correspond with the utilitarian maxim. If, on the other hand, it is modified by the comprehensive and unselfish view of the effects of conduct which utilitarianism demands, it must be at the expense of correcting

society requires under pain of punishment by excommunication or otherwise,—the genuine offences that are not passed over.” This would certainly be very desirable, were it not from the nature of the case impracticable. Popular judgment as to a man’s conduct,—what society imposes,—is one of the things most difficult to predict: it is under the influence of most heterogeneous causes, personal, industrial, religious, political, &c I do not think, for instance, that any one could safely undertake to describe exactly the kind of actions which will infallibly call forth the censure of British public opinion, or that of the smaller and intersecting groups into which society is divided.

¹ Emotions, p. 288.

its original edicts, and so far discrediting its authoritative claims.

The "social sanction" would be of much greater service if used to show how a solidarity is brought about between the interests and feelings of the individual and those of his neighbours, from which the utilitarian maxim may be arrived at by a generalisation of his principle of conduct as modified by the social impulse. But this would not constitute a logical justification of utilitarianism : it would show how the principle has been arrived at, but without giving a sufficient reason to the individual for adopting it. And this is really the tendency of much recent discussion—of Professor Bain's theory of conscience as a reflex of the external order, of George Grote's analysis of the moral sentiment, and of Mill's doctrine of the progressive identification of the individual's feelings with those of his neighbours through the gradual increase of sympathetic pleasures and pains: for it was to this source that Mill looked for the practical solution of the antinomy between his psychological and ethical theories, though he himself tried to pass from one position to the other by means of the "highway in the air" constructed by his own logic.

Value of the
social sanc-
tion

apart from
logical proof
of utilitari-
anism.

Mill's attempt to pass by a logical method from psychological hedonism to utilitarianism is an in-

4. Mill's
logical de-

ence of
utilitarian-
ism.

structive commentary on the difficulties which beset the transition. His work may be described as a vindication of the utilitarian morality, first, from the charge of sensualism; and secondly, from that of selfishness. And it is largely owing to his polemic that utilitarianism is no longer looked upon as either a sensual or a selfish theory. It is not sensual, unless, indeed, the pleasures of most men are of a sensual kind. So far from being selfish, it is almost stoical in the subordination of individual desires it enjoins. But Mill wished to do more than clear the character of utilitarian ethics. He wished to show a logical reason for utilitarians pursuing elevated pleasures rather than base ones, and to demonstrate the connection of his moral imperative with the principles which the school he belonged to laid down for human motives. In both these respects his failure is conspicuous.

(a) distinc-
tion of kinds
of pleasure,

In the former endeavour, he went against Bentham by attempting to draw a distinction in kind amongst pleasures—a distinction not reducible to quantitative measurement. A higher degree of quality in the pleasure sought was to outweigh any difference in its amount or quantity. With this modification, utilitarianism is made to require a subordination of the lower or sensuous nature to the higher or intellectual nature. Pleasure, indeed, is still the end; but the “higher” pleasure takes precedence over the “lower,” irrespective of the

amount of pleasant feeling that results. Pleasure is still the standard, but not the ultimate standard; for a further appeal has to be made to the criterion that distinguishes one pleasure from another, not as merely greater or less, but as higher or lower. As is well known, Mill did not look either to the action or to the feeling itself for this criterion. To have done so would have implied an acknowledgment that pleasure was no longer regarded as the ultimate standard. He found the criterion of superiority simply in the opinion people of experience have about the relative desirability of various sorts of pleasure. But such a criterion only pushes the final question of the standard one step farther back. Those people of experience to whom Mill refers—who have tried both kinds of pleasure, and prefer one of them¹—can they give no reason for, no account of, their preference? If so, to trust them is to appeal to blind authority, and to relinquish anything like a science of ethics. But, if Mill's authorities can reflect on their feelings, as well as feel, they can only tell us one or other of two things. Either the so-called "higher" pleasure is actually, as pleasure, so preferable to that called "lower," that the smallest amount of the one would be more pleasurable than the largest amount

determined
by author-
ity,

¹ I have spoken, for simplicity's sake, as if there were two kinds of pleasure easily distinguishable. But the question is really much more complicated.

either can
be reduced
to difference
of quantity,
or leads to
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istic stand-
ard;

of the other; or else the higher is called higher, and is to be preferred to the lower—even although the latter may be greater as pleasure—because of a quality belonging to it over and above its character as pleasant feeling. The former verdict would be in the first place paradoxical, and, in the second place, would give up Mill's case, by reducing quality to a quantitative standard. Besides, it would be no valid ground of preference for men in general; since the pleasure of various actions and states differs according to the susceptibility of the subject. According to the latter verdict, the characteristic upon which the distinction of quality depends, and not pleasure itself, becomes the ethical standard.

(b) ambigu-
ities in his
proof of
utilitarian-
ism

In respect of his main contention, that utilitarianism is a theory of beneficence, and not of prudence or of selfishness, Mill emphasised even more strongly than Bentham had done the distinction between the egoism which seeks its own things, and the utilitarianism according to which everybody counts for one, and nobody for more than one. But when he attempted to connect this doctrine logically with the psychological postulates of his school, he committed a double error. In the first place, he confused the purely psychological question of the motives that influence human conduct with the ethical question of the end to which conduct ought to be directed; and, in the second place, he disregarded

the difference of end there may be for society as a collective whole, and for each member of the society individually. "There is in reality," he says,¹ "nothing desired except happiness;" and this psychological theory is too hastily identified with the ethical principle that happiness alone is desirable, or what ought to be desired and pursued. Moreover, "no reason," he says, "can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness." And this admission, which seems as good as saying that no reason at all can be given why the individual should desire the general happiness, is only held to be a sufficient reason for it, through assuming that what is good for all as an aggregate is good for each member of the aggregate: "That each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons."²

It may appear strange to offer the preceding as the logical basis of an ethical principle which has had so wide and, on the whole, beneficial an influence as utilitarianism. The explanation is to be found in the want of full coherence which often exists, and is nowhere commoner than in English ethics, between an author's practical view of life and the foundation of psychology or metaphysics with which

Imperfect
coherence
of ethical
and theo-
retical phil-
osophy.

¹ Utilitarianism, p. 57.

² Ibid., p. 53.

it is connected. It would certainly be wrong to imagine that Bentham's self-denying labours rested on a confusion of standpoints, or that Mill's moral enthusiasm had no other support than a logical quibble. To both of them, and to many others, utilitarianism was an ethical creed influencing their lives, which was scarcely connected with the attempt to justify it logically. Such reasons in its favour as they adduced were rather after-thoughts for the defence of their creed than the foundations on which it was built.

5. Actual
transition to
utilitarian-
ism

The formula of utilitarianism cannot be expressed as the conclusion of a syllogism or of an inductive inference. It seems rather to have been arrived at by the production—or the recognition—of a sympathetic or “altruistic” sentiment, which was made to yield a general principle for the guidance of conduct. This process involves two steps, which are consecutive and complementary, although the positions they connect are not necessarily related. The first step is to overcome the selfish principle of action in the individual; the second to generalise it, and obtain a principle for the non-selfish action that results. Mill seems to be the only recent writer who, in making this transition, adheres strictly to the psychological hedonism distinctive of his school. He looks to the influence of education in increasing the feeling of unity between one man and his neighbours, till individual action be-

comes merged in altruistic or social action. "The social state," he says, "is at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that, except in some unusual circumstances, or by an effort of voluntary abstraction, he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body."¹ This is perfectly true, but does not imply a sublation of selfishness. A man "never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body;" but it does not follow from this that he will subordinate his own interests to the interests of the other members when the two clash. In cases of conflict the individual often tends to sacrifice the good of his neighbours to his own good; and he may do so although he fully recognises the social consequences of action, just because he still remains at the ethical standpoint which treats private good as superior to public. It is true, as Mill contends, that, "in an improving state of the human mind, the influences are constantly on the increase, which tend to generate in each individual a feeling of unity with all the rest; which feeling, if perfect, would make him never think of, or desire, any beneficial condition for himself, in the benefits of which they are not included."² But this is not sufficient to connect the two antagonistic

¹ Utilitarianism, p. 46. But no statement of the sociality of man could be more explicit or satisfactory than that of Butler, Sermons, i.

² Utilitarianism, p. 48.

poles of Mill's system. It starts with assuming the notion of an "improving state," of the human mind, as determined according to an ethical standard not yet arrived at; and it gives no valid account of the means by which the improvement is to be brought about. It is prophetic of a time when the motives of human nature will have been so modified that the antagonism between self and others will be no longer felt; but it offers no practical solution of the antinomy suited to present circumstances.

(a) recogni-
tion of Sym-
pathy

The basis of the ethical sentiment by which the desires and actions of a man are to be brought into harmony with those of his fellows is investigated in a more thorough manner by Professor Bain and by George Grote. But both of these writers stand on a somewhat different platform from the strict psychological hedonism which Mill never relinquished. Thus Grote enumerates as "elementary tendencies of the mind," which ethical sentiment presupposes, and out of which it is compounded, self-regarding tendencies, sympathetic tendencies, benevolent affections, malevolent affections, and (though in a smaller degree) love and hatred of those who cause pleasure and pain to others;¹ and this without interpreting sympathy, in the way that Mill does, as having for its end the pleasures which come with the gratification of the sympathetic impulse, or the removal of the pain caused by its

¹ Fragments on Ethical Subjects (1876), p. 6.

restraint. As Professor Bain argues, this position of Mill's "is tenable only on the ground that the *omission* of a disinterested act that we are inclined to, would give us so much *pain* that it is on the whole for our comfort that we should make the requisite sacrifice. There is plausibility in this supposition." But "the doctrine breaks down when we try it upon extreme cases . . . All that people usually suffer from stifling a generous impulse is too slight and transient to be placed against any important sacrifice."¹ In recognising sympathy as a "purely disinterested" impulse,² Mr Bain breaks loose at an important point from the psychology of Bentham. He is indeed only kept from a complete break with it by the position he ascribes to sympathy as outside of the ordinary sphere of voluntary action. Above all things, it would seem to be necessary that nothing should conflict with "our character as rational beings, which is to desire everything exactly according to its pleasure-value."³ But sympathy obviously "clashes with the regular outgoings of the will in favour of our pleasures," so that it ought to be placed outside voluntary action, and regarded

as disinter-
ested, by
Bain,

¹ The Emotions and the Will, 3d ed., p. 295

² Ibid., p. 111, cf. *Mind*, viii 55. "The important exceptions to the law of Pleasure and Pain are (1) Fixed Ideas, (2) Habits, and (3) Disinterested action for others"

³ Emotions, p. 438.

simply as "a remarkable and crowning instance of the Fixed Idea."¹

without being applied to determine the ethical end,

It is owing to its exclusion, as a fixed idea, from the sphere of voluntary conduct, that sympathetic appropriation of the feelings of others has little or no place assigned it by Professor Bain, when he goes on² to describe the way in which the moral opinions of men have actually originated. They have, he holds, a twofold source—the one arising from the necessity for public security, the other being of sentimental origin. The former makes society ordain those acts and services required for its own preservation. The latter leads to the confusion of this necessary element of morality with the sentimental likes and dislikes which may be characteristic of different people. These are "mixed up in one code with the imperative duties that hold society together;" and it is only when "we disentangle this complication, and refer each class of duties to their proper origin," that we can "obtain a clear insight into the foundations of morality."³ Morality, therefore, is that which is imposed by society for its own preservation and security, and which is sanctioned by the punishments of society either in its "public judicial acts," or "by the unofficial expressions of disapprobation and the exclusion from social good offices."⁴ Of this ex-

¹ Emotions, p. 121.

² Ibid., p. 271 ff

³ Ibid., p. 273.

⁴ Ibid., p. 264.

ternal law the moral sense or conscience is merely a subjective mirror or copy. The duty of unselfishness is not connected with the disinterested impulse of sympathy, but is traced to the external order of society, which has found it necessary to restrain the self-seeking action of individuals—a restraint which has come to be transferred to the consciences of the members of the society.

Mr Bain's theory falls back in this way upon external authority, just as Bentham's did; and, for the same reasons, they are neither of them able to prescribe the utilitarian principle of conduct. But, in his assertion of the disinterested nature of sympathy, Mr Bain has introduced—though he has not himself utilised—a fruitful principle, by means of which a basis of moral sentiment may be found by means of which it is possible to escape from ethical as well as psychological egoism.

This element of sympathy is most fully recognised in the instructive analysis of ethical sentiment by the late George Grote. At the same time, Grote does not, like Adam Smith, for instance, attempt to evolve the material characteristics of approbation and disapprobation from this source. The mere putting of one's self in the place of a spectator—or in that of the patient—instead of that of the agent, is only a formal change, which will modify our judgments or feelings without accounting for their actual content. But a uniform formal element

and by
Grote.

in all ethical sentiment is, according to Grote, a man's "constant habit of viewing and judging of circumstances around him," both from the point of view of the agent and from that of the patient.¹ This twofold position is occupied by every individual. He is an agent, and in that position his own interests and feelings are separate from, and often at variance with, those of others. But he is also a patient in respect of the actions of others, and in that position his interests and his feelings are commonly in unison with those of the majority. Hence a man is led constantly to adopt ideally the point of view which is not actually his own at the time, so that "the idea of the judgment which others will form becomes constantly and indissolubly associated with the idea of action in the mind of every agent." In every community, certain actions are visited with the admiration, esteem, and protection of the society, certain other actions with the opposite feelings and results so that there arises "an association in my mind of a certain line of conduct on the part both of myself and of any other individual agent, with a certain sentiment resulting from such conduct, and excited by it, in the minds of the general public around us. It is a sentiment of *regulated social reciprocity* as between the agent and the society amongst which he lives." And this sentiment, when enforced by a sanction,

¹ Fragments on Ethical Subjects, p. 8 f

constitutes the complete form of ethical sentiment.

As a complete explanation of the moral sentiments and judgments of men, this theory does not seem to be above criticism. It requires not only an association between every personal action and the feelings—sympathetically imagined by the agent—with which the action will be regarded by others, but it also implies that this association has become so inseparable that the feeling appears as an individual or personal one, distinguished by the subject from other sentiments which he has on consciously imagining himself in the position of others. But it is referred to here as illustrating what we find in Mill, and, in a different way, in Professor Bain, that the first real step towards the utilitarian standard is to make the individual pass somehow or other to a standpoint outside his own nature. In Mill this is done mainly by the assertion of the social nature of man, in Grote by showing how a moral sentiment may be arrived at by the combined action of sympathy and association.

The further influence required in the transition to utilitarianism is the idea of equality. The best expression of utilitarian doctrine followed soon after the assertion of the equal rights of men which signalised the politics of the end of last century in the French and American revolutions. Bentham was permeated by the spirit of this movement,

(b) The idea
of Equality

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however far he might be from accepting its abstractions about natural rights. In his hands, too, utilitarianism was a political rather than an ethical doctrine. "Everybody to count for one and nobody for more than one" follows naturally from the phrase, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." Without this assertion of the necessity of an equal distribution, there is no safeguard against sympathy being restricted and partial in its operation. Indeed the feeling of sympathy in itself is naturally strongest towards those with whom one is in most frequent relation, or connected by numerous associative ties; and if left to itself, it might therefore be expected to give rise to the extended selfishness of class or family interest, only relieved by a spasmodic humanitarianism. This tendency is corrected by the dogma of human equality, which had been formulated as a juridical maxim in the Roman *Jus Gentium*, but afterwards passed into a political creed, and found vent in the literature of the eighteenth century and in the public events which marked its close.

The change which this notion of human equality passed through has been traced by Sir Henry Maine. "Where the Roman jurisconsult had written 'æquales sunt,' meaning exactly what he said, the modern civilian wrote 'all men are equal' in the sense of 'all men ought to be equal.' The peculiar Roman idea that natural law co-

existed with civil law and gradually absorbed it, had evidently been lost sight of, or had become unintelligible, and the words that had at most conveyed a theory concerning the origin, composition, and development of human institutions, were beginning to express the sense of a great standing wrong suffered by mankind.”¹ Now Bentham, influence of the idea on Bentham. however far he may have been from trusting to the system of ‘natural law,’² was certainly not beyond the influence of the idea of human equality which it carried in its train; and, from his own point of view, he laboured to defend it. In assimilating this idea, utilitarianism has preserved one of the best results of the old “law of nature,” without the ambiguity with which it had formerly been used,³ if in a sense which admits of a somewhat narrow and abstract interpretation.

¹ Ancient Law, 8th ed., p. 93

² Principles of Morals and Legislation, chap. ii § 14 n

³ The ambiguity of the phrase is explained in an interesting way in Sir H. Maine’s account of the change from its juridical to a political or ethical meaning. In some writers it seems to have a third and still different signification. We must thus distinguish (1) the juridical meaning, originating in the Roman “law common to all nations,” which had arisen through the “constant *levelling* or removal of irregularities which went on wherever the prætorian system was applied to the cases of foreign litigants,” modified subsequently by the Greek conception of *ισότης*. (2) The political meaning, that all men ought to be equal, arose from the preceding. But its notion of “ought” seems often to depend on an idea of the constitution of nature according to which all men are actually born equal—not only in rights, soon to be obscured by human convention, but also in power or faculty,

It is true that this does not give exactly the result which is usually described as utilitarianism. I have spoken of the notion of equality as the regulator of sympathy—a canon in accordance with which the sympathetic impulse is to be guided. Sympathy impels us to relieve the pains and increase the pleasures of our fellow-men. The principle of equality dictates that this sympathetic activity is to be directed to the happiness of all men equally. Every one whom our conduct may be made to affect is to count as a unit, and a unit only. The distribution is not to be according to kinship of blood or social ties, though it is so much

afterwards unequally developed by education. Hence (3) the natural meaning. The doctrines of evolution and heredity have made this view seem as strange to us now as it would have done to the Romans from whom it was illegitimately derived. Yet at one time it seems to have been assumed, almost without question, that there is but little difference in the natural endowments of different men. This assumption lay at the basis of Hobbes's political theory—*Leviathan*, I xiii. p. 60,—was stated in a more guarded form by Locke—*On Education*, § 1; *Works*, ed. of 1824, i 6,—and adopted almost without qualification by Helvétius, who, carrying out Locke's metaphor of the soul as, at birth, a "*tabula rasa*," afterwards written over with the pen of experience, says: "*Quintilien, Locke, et moi, disons: L'inégalité des esprits est l'effet d'une cause connue, et cette cause est la différence de l'éducation*"—the causes of the existing inequality being afterwards stated as twofold—first, the difference of environment, which may be called chance, and secondly, the difference of strength in the desire for instruction—*De l'homme*, II. 1., III. i, IV. xxii., *Œuvres*, ii. 71, 91, 280. (Quintilian's statement, however, is even more guarded than Locke's. Cf *Opera*, ed. Spalding, i. 47.)

more in our power to promote the happiness of those closely connected with us, that it may fairly occupy a larger share of our thought and energy than the happiness of other people does. Utilitarianism carries the application of the principle of equality still farther, by looking upon self as a unit whose happiness is to be regarded as of exactly equal value with that of any one else. With every individual reduced to the same ethical worth, happiness is declared to be the end of moral action, and equality of distribution the rule for deciding between the claims of competing individuals.

It seems to me, therefore, that utilitarianism is a theory compounded out of two quite different elements. On the one side the basis of the theory has been laid by Bentham and Mill in a naturalistic psychology which looks upon pleasure as the only object of desire. To this there is superadded the idea of equality, which is the distinctively ethical element in the theory. But it is only by confusion that the idea of equality—which Bentham expresses by the proposition that the happiness of one man is to count for no more than the happiness of another—can be supposed to be derived from the same theory of human nature as that which identifies pleasure and desire. Utilitarianism only becomes a practicable end for individual conduct when psychological hedonism has been given up. It is futile to say that one ought to pursue the

6. The two sides of utilitarian theory not logically connected

greatest happiness of the greatest number, unless it is possible for the individual to act for something else than his own pleasure—that is, for an end which is for him not pleasure at all. In a word, utilitarianism, while maintaining that the only thing worth desiring is pleasure, must at the same time admit that pleasure is not the only object that can be or is desired: otherwise, it can never advance from the egoistic to the universalistic form.

This view receives confirmation from the way in which utilitarianism is held by the most eminent of living moralists. In the 'Methods of Ethics,' the tradition of Bentham is expressly united with the doctrines of Butler and Clarke. Professor Sidgwick agrees with Bentham, and the long line of moralists from Epicurus downwards, in maintaining the doctrine of ethical hedonism, that pleasure is the only thing ultimately desirable; but, with Butler, he rejects the psychological hedonism, according to which pleasure is the only object of desire. So far from these two positions being inconsistent, it is only through the second that the first can be held in its universalistic form. The problem is, however, how to unite them. In Professor Sidgwick's theory, they are connected by the application of the ethical maxims of benevolence and equity, which an exhaustive examination of ethical intuitions has left standing as

axioms of the practical reason. Though utilitarianism, therefore, is still adhered to, it is on an expressly Rational ground, not on the basis of Naturalism.

In this and the previous chapter, I have looked at human nature from the point of view of psychological hedonism, and have endeavoured to show what ethical principles that theory leads to, or is consistent with. The theory does not deny that there is a great diversity of capacities and interests in man. But it holds that, so far as concerns conduct, they admit of being brought under one general law—that every action is subject to the rule of the “two sovereign masters, pleasure and pain.” It is evident, therefore, that if ethics is to be connected at all with psychology—if what ought to be done is in any degree what can be done—the end of conduct must be hedonistic. The psychological fact cannot indeed be without more ado turned into a moral imperative. Yet this much may be admitted, that if this interpretation of action leaves room for ethics at all, the end prescribed can be nothing else than pleasure, or the avoidance of pain.

The question, therefore, was how to determine the pleasure which is to be sought? And I have tried to show, in the chapter just concluded, that utilitarianism does not admit of being logically

7 Summary
of ethical
consequences of
psychological
hedonism

(a) no logical
connection with
utilitarianism;

arrived at from this point of view. It may indeed, under certain circumstances,¹ be the guide of political or social enactments; but these can only be made to bear upon the conduct of individuals by the sanctions which the State or Society has at its command. The individual can have as his maxim of conduct an end which corresponds with utilitarianism in two events only: when he is so constituted as to find his pleasure in the greatest aggregate pleasure of mankind, or when the political and social sanctions are so complete and searching as to make his individual interest and the collective interest coincide. The former event is unfortunately too rare to be taken into account in establishing a theory; the latter would imply an interference with individual liberty so impracticable that it is not contemplated even in the most comprehensive of socialistic schemes.

o) admits
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Hedonism in psychology, therefore, means egoism in ethics. But even this theory, as the previous chapter has shown, has its own difficulties to meet. The antagonism of individual and universal has not yet been got rid of. The difficulty is no longer caused by the conflict between one man and his neighbours: it is the difference between the feeling

¹ That is, when (1) the legislature accurately expresses the average feeling of all the members of the State; or (2) the legislators happen to be fully intelligent people in whom "selfishness" has taken the shape of benevolence.

and action of a moment, and the sum of feelings and actions which makes up a lifetime. It is true that, if we admit that pleasure is the only thing worth pursuing, and that by "pleasure" a man means "his own pleasure," there is so far no reason for preferring the pleasure of one moment to that of another, except as more certain or of greater amount or degree;¹ but this is to start with ascribing a value to pleasure, and not with the simple fact that pleasure is desired. If psychological hedonism is our starting-point—and we give to the theory the interpretation that has the greatest verisimilitude—it is the greatest present pleasure that rules. And, although the man of reflection will no doubt attempt to estimate the future pleasure at its true value in comparison with the pleasure actually present, this can never have full effect upon his will. It has been shown, indeed, that the realisation of egoistic hedonism is not merely unattainable from the point of view of psychological hedonism, but that it would involve conditions inconsistent with the nature of desire.

only under impossible conditions.

¹ Although, as is well known, propinquity was held by Bentham to be an independent ground of distinction and preference. —Principles of Morals and Legislation, chap. iv. sect. 2.

CHAPTER IV.

MORAL SENTIMENT.

1 A uniform theory such as psychological hedonism

PSYCHOLOGICAL hedonism possesses the merit of offering a simple and uniform theory of mental action. It may admit conflicting accounts of the kinds of action and sufferance which actually give men pleasure and pain,—a point on which, for example, Hobbes and J. S. Mill differ widely. But it has one general formula for the relation of feeling to action, which has been precise and clear enough to attract many psychologists. The ethical consequences of the theory have, indeed, turned out—if the argument of the preceding chapters is valid—to be neither so obvious nor so satisfactory as its adherents have commonly supposed. But it must nevertheless be admitted that, if psychology shows pleasure to be, as a matter of fact, the constant end of action, it will be useless—even if it is not impossible—for ethics to prescribe any other end.

The opponents of ethical hedonism have thus uniformly insisted that the theory which makes pleasure the end and motive of all conscious activity is imperfect, and this psychological question has been the battle-field of many of the controversies, at any rate, of English ethics. Psychological hedonism has not, however, been confronted by the English moralists with an opposed theory of equal simplicity, nor can the controversy be said to have led to a thorough analysis of action. The psychological investigation has, in most cases, been carried no farther than the ethical interests at stake seemed to require; and the predominance of these interests has perhaps prevented the inquiry from being carried out with complete freedom from preconception on either side.

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donism,

A uniform theory under which our various particular desires might be brought may, indeed, be said to have been suggested by Butler. He meets the hedonistic proposition that all desire is for personal pleasure, by the doctrine that no particular desire has pleasure as its end, since all pleasure presupposes a previous desire in the satisfaction of which it consists.¹ This theory, which may have been derived from Plato,² and was afterwards

¹ "The very idea of an interested pursuit necessarily presupposes particular passions or appetites; since the very idea of interest or happiness consists in this, that an appetite or affection enjoys its object"—*Sermons*, Pref., cf *Serm.* xi.

² *Phil.*, 31 ff., cf *Gorg.*, 495 f; *Rep.*, ix. 585.

used by Schopenhauer to prove the negative nature of pleasure and consequent worthlessness of life, is, however, a generalisation which cannot be made to include the whole facts to be taken account of.¹ Many pleasures occur independently of any precedent desire. And what Butler had to show—and was really concerned to show—was that desire was not exclusively directed to objects thus independently found to be pleasurable: the contradictory, that is to say, and not the contrary, of psychological hedonism.

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activity.

. For this purpose Butler pointed to the whole class of affections which, although they may also tend to private interest, have an immediate reference to the good of others; and, in addition to these, he contended for an original principle of benevolence towards others in human nature, as well as of self-love or care for one's own interests and happiness. This latter, he held, so far from being the sole principle of action, implied the existence of a number of particular passions and affections, directed immediately to external objects—the satisfaction of these desires giving pleasure, though pleasure was not the end they aimed at. Voluntary action is thus not brought under any common rubric; for, at the same time that the calm principle of self-love is directed to the agent's greatest pleasure, the object of hunger, for example, is said

¹ Cf. Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, I. iv. 2, 3d ed., p 44.

to be not pleasure but food, that of benevolence not personal pleasure but the good of others.

The attempt to give unity to the non-hedonistic view of desire has come from a different quarter. Uninfluenced by the exigencies of ethical controversy, which formed the entire motive of Butler's investigation, Herbart and his school have worked out a theory of desire, which has many points of comparison with that of Butler. However much they may differ from the English moralist—they are at one with him in rejecting the maxim of psychological hedonism, *nihil appetimus nisi sub specie boni*; and their differences from him are largely due to their having gone further in their analysis of the facts, and endeavoured to bring them under a general principle.

Non-hedonistic action generalised by Herbart,

Butler's view of the object of desire is distinguished from the Herbartian chiefly in two respects. In the first place, he identifies that object with the external or real thing, whereas Herbart is careful to point out that it is a presentation or idea. In the second place, while Butler is content to postulate an original tendency of our nature towards certain objects, Herbart attempts to get behind this tendency, and explain the phenomena of striving from the interaction of presentations. Over and above the ordinary hypothesis of natural realism, Butler's theory implies a sort of pre-established

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harmony between our active tendencies and things outside the mind, in virtue of which some of these things do, and some do not, attract our desires. Herbart, on the other hand, attempts nothing less than a complete genetic account of mental phenomena, explaining the facts of presentation, desire, and feeling through "the persistence of presentation in consciousness and their rise into clearer consciousness."¹ The phenomena of desire and feeling are both accounted for by this mechanism of impelling and inhibiting forces.²

It would be beyond the scope of this Essay to examine the above view of the active side of mental phenomena. For present purposes it is enough to draw attention to the fact that the common deduction of the phenomena of desire and will from the feelings of pleasure and pain is not the only "scientific" theory of human action, and that it is rejected on its merits by writers who have no hankering after what the psychological hedonist would call the mystical element of free-will. It is of interest to note, too, that Professor Bain, in

¹ Herbart, *Psychologie als Wissenschaft*, § 104, *Werke*, vi. 74 ; cf. *Waltz, Lehrbuch der Psychologie als Naturwissenschaft*, § 40, p. 418. "It is not difficult to recognise the basis of desire in the presentations brought forward by reproduction, and, at the same time, held back by an inhibition."

² With Herbart's doctrine may be compared Mr H. Spencer's view of the genesis of feeling and voluntary action, *Principles of Psychology*, 2d ed., part iv chaps. viii. and ix.

whose works the traditions of psychological hedonism find their most careful expression, has modified the doctrine so as to allow of desire of pleasure and avoidance of pain explaining less than had been formerly required of them. Outside the circle of hedonistically-determined motives, he recognises the influence of the presentation or idea as a self-realising element in the individual consciousness, apart from its pleasurable or painful characteristics.¹ Those "fixed ideas," as Mr Bain calls them, tend both to persist in the mind, and to project themselves into action, independently of pleasure and pain—or at least with a force which is out of proportion to the pleasure they bring. As has been already seen, it is by means of this doctrine that he explains "the great fact of our nature denominated sympathy, fellow-feeling, pity, compassion, disinterestedness."² To the same category belongs "much of the ambition and the aspirations of human beings. . . . A certain notion—say of power, wealth, grandeur—has fixed itself in our mind and keeps a persistent hold there." It is asserted, indeed, that the action of such fixed ideas "perverts the regular operation of the will which would lead us to renounce whatever is hopeless or not worth the cost." And, certainly, their admission among

This tendency recognised in the doctrine of fixed ideas

¹ Cf. note to James Mill's *Analysis*, ii. 383 f.

² *The Senses and the Intellect*, 3d ed., p. 344; cf. *Mental and Moral Science*, pp. 90, 91.

mental phenomena seems to imply the superposition of a new theory of action upon the old theory of psychological hedonism. There is no disguising the importance of the modification thus introduced. The name "fixed idea" is misleading if it be taken to imply that persistency and tendency to action are properties belonging to a certain class of ideas only. Mr Bain's doctrine is founded on the hypothesis of the identity of the nervous centres which function in representation and in sensation, and is therefore valid of all representations or ideas. The characteristics of persistency, and of tendency to action, are therefore normal characteristics of presentations, though they may belong in an unusual degree to some ideas from the relation these hold to the dominant cluster of ideas in the individual consciousness. And if we thus attribute to all ideas without exception the tendency to self-realisation, and recognise—as we must—the relation of mutual assistance or inhibition which ideas bear to one another in virtue of their being "presented" to the same subject, we have granted the material out of which, in Herbart's skilful "*Mechanik des Geistes*," the phenomena of feeling and desire are woven.

2. The non-hedonistic theory of action.

The view of individual human nature, which holds that all its desires are not directed to personal pleasure, thus claims consideration. With its less restricted theory of action, this doctrine

may seem to offer a larger means of determining the appropriate end of human conduct. In particular, the suggestion naturally occurs that the ethical end will, on this theory, be something else than pleasure.¹ But there is, nevertheless, no contradiction in holding—as Mr Sidgwick does—that although other objects than pleasure are actually desired, there is nothing else which can be held to be ultimately desirable, or the tendency to which can be said to have moral worth.

The ethical barrenness of psychological hedonism has been seen to result from its narrow and inflexible view of human nature. But theories such as those now to be considered have, in an ethical regard, to overcome a difficulty of another kind in the variety of impulses which they admit upon the stage. The “objects” to which these impulses or desires relate have as yet received no further characterisation than that they are objects of desire. And the difficulty of finding a principle by which some order of precedence or value amongst them may be determined is just, in other words, the difficulty of obtaining a moral standard.

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The question does not ordinarily arise in the

¹ “If there be any principles or affections in the mind of man distinct from self-love, that the things those principles tend towards, or the objects of those affections are, each of them in themselves eligible to be pursued upon its own account, and to be rested in as an end, is implied in the very idea of such principle or affection.”—Butler, Sermons, Pref

above form, because the moral standard is commonly taken for granted, and the various impulses, affections, and dispositions are made to derive their ethical rank from their relation to that standard. But this method is obviously inappropriate when the standard is still to be ascertained, its determination being the object of inquiry. And it may seem that the constitution of man contains in itself a means of distinguishing the moral value of its various elements, or of the actions to which they lead, and thus furnishing a moral standard or end for conduct. This purpose seems to have been to some extent, though not quite clearly, kept in view by the writers who, in last century, contended against the selfish theory which had been so crudely enunciated by Hobbes. They attempted to show that selfishness was not the only, nor even the most prominent, principle of action; and, from the system of diverse principles which they found implanted in human nature, they endeavoured to work out a theory of conduct.

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Especially amongst the later English moralists—Adam Smith, for instance—the question of the end or standard came almost to drop out of sight in the midst of the controversy regarding the nature of the “moral sense” or “moral faculty”—the way, that is, in which we become aware of the difference between right and wrong. But in Shaftesbury, Butler, and Hutcheson—the writers

who formulated this doctrine of the moral sense—the attempt is made to connect a theory of the criterion of morality with the source of our knowledge of it. Shaftesbury and Hutcheson both looked upon social welfare or the general happiness as the end of moral conduct, and the criterion in accordance with which moral character is ascribed to actions; at the same time that their main contention was for the immediateness of the “sense” by which we perceive these moral qualities. And they sought to establish the connection of the two doctrines by means of the benevolent feelings—which they held to be original and independent of private interest—and their immediate approval by the reflex or moral sense of the individual man. Similar ideas appear in Butler, at the same time that he tended to make conscience or the moral sense the standard of morality, as well as the source of our knowledge of it. They, as well as he, however, found it necessary to come back from the social or political to the individual point of view. Even if their conception of “the good” was not evolved from the nature of the individual man, their philosophical standpoint required them to leave broader ground, and show it to be the individual’s natural goal. And in doing this, their constant tendency is to revert to egoistic arguments—demonstrating the complete harmony of virtue and interest, or attempting to prove to the

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individual that his own happiness consists in the exercise of the social affections. Thus Shaftesbury tries to show, by an empirical collection of results, that to have the "natural" (or social) affections too weak, or the private affections too strong, is a source of misery,¹ as well as the chief source of vice; and that, largely owing to the pleasure of virtuous action, it is "to the private interest and good of every one to work to the general good"² Hutcheson, again, devotes a large portion of his most mature work to allay the suspicion "that in following the impulse of our kind affections and the moral faculty we are counteracting our interests, and abandoning what may be of more consequence to our happiness than either this self-approbation or the applauses of others,"³ while Butler, referring to virtuous conduct, says, in a well-known passage, that "when we sit down in a cool hour we can neither justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit, till we are convinced that it will be for our happiness, or at least not contrary to it"⁴ Opposed as the whole school were to the selfish theory of human action, they never spoke of any sacrifice of private happiness as a thing to be looked for, or in any way taken into account, in conduct which is the result of calm deliberation. It is difficult, there-

¹ Inquiry concerning Virtue, II. i. 3

² Ibid, II ii, conclusion

³ System of Moral Philosophy, i. 99.

⁴ Sermons, xi.

fore, to avoid the judgment passed upon them by Schleiermacher, that "the English school of Shaftesbury, with all their talk about virtue, are really given up to pleasure."¹

At the same time, their writings constantly suggest a theory of morals which is neither obliged to adopt off-hand a utilitarian criterion of virtue, nor forced to fall back upon the egoistic sanctions of personal pleasure and pain. Their psychological theory points to an ethical doctrine in which pleasure is neither the sole end of action, nor its sole motive. They do not, indeed, make quite clear the transition from the psychological to the ethical point of view; and critics are still fond of confronting Butler with the objection he anticipated—Why ought I to obey my conscience? The apparent *petitio principii* of Butler's answer, Because it is the law of your nature, is due to the way in which the teleological standpoint is introduced. The purpose of which (according to Butler) man is the vehicle or realising organism is spoken of as a law externally imposed, and deriving its authority, not from its own nature, but from the nature of its origin.

3. Ethics may be made to depend on the moral sense.

There would seem to be one way only to surmount the difficulty arising from the variety of impulses of which the nature of man is made up, and that is by consistently following out the teleo-

¹ Kritik der bisherigen Sittenlehre (1803), p. 54.

Different
views of the
nature of
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logical point of view. But what, the question is, is the final or comprehensive end to which human nature points amidst this diversity of objects of striving? The doctrine of the "moral sense" attempts to answer the question. Now this moral sense may either be regarded as not itself a separate faculty, but simply an expression for the harmony of human tendencies; or it may be looked upon as a separate and superior capacity, which, again, may either be interpreted in terms of sense, or of the understanding—the former interpretation leading to its identification with pleasure, the latter to its being conceived as law.

(a) The harmony of
impulses
Shaftesbury's
theory.

These different methods were attempted by the English moralists—the first, however, to a less extent than the others. But it inspired much of Shaftesbury's work, though it cannot be said to have been consistently developed by him. The conflict of impulses in man was too obvious a fact not to be apparent even in Shaftesbury's roseate view of life. He recognised, indeed, not only private or self-affections, promoting the good of the individual, and "natural" or social affections, which led to the public good, but also "unnatural affections," which tended to no good whatever.¹ The reference to consequences is thus made prominent at once. The last class of affections is

¹ Inquiry, II. i. 3.

condemned outright because of its infelicitic results; while an attempt is made to prove from experience that the courses of conduct to which the two former lead coincide. Shaftesbury contended for a real organic union between the individual and society, but, when he came to establish its nature, he made it consist in an asserted harmony of interests, while the obligation to virtue was allowed to rest on its conduciveness to personal pleasure. He sometimes spoke of virtue as identical with the harmonious development of the affections of the individual man;¹ but he expressly defined it as consisting in the individual "having all his inclinations and affections . . . agreeing with the good of his kind or of that system in which he is included, and of which he constitutes a part."² And the two views can only be connected by proving that the harmonious development of an individual's affections will lead to the good of the species: the proof of this depending on a one-sided summation of consequences. Shaftesbury does, indeed, throw out the idea that both the self-affections and the "natural" or social affections become self-destructive when carried out so as to interfere with one another. But this, again, has only the previous calculus of the results of conduct to support it. He cannot show that the contradiction in the conception of a completely solitary being belongs also to the con-

¹ *Inquiry*, II. i. 3; II. ii. 2.

² *Ibid.*, II i. 1.

ception of a judiciously selfish being. The latter being loses the pleasures of virtuous action, but perhaps he may gain greater pleasures in their room. He does not develop his whole nature, but if that nature contains totally infelicitic passions, the development of the whole nature is not to be recommended.

Thus Shaftesbury is unable to reach a conception of man's nature as a harmony of impulses just on account of the external point of view which makes him treat it as an aggregate, though he contends that it is an organism. His ingenious and subtle account of the relations between the individual and society does not really go to the root of the matter, because, after all, it remains a calculus of the results of action, not an analysis of its nature. And his view of the affections constituting the individual system leaves them wanting in the unity of organic connection. An effort is made, however, to supply this defect by means of the reflex affections called the "moral sense," to which he ascribes an oversight over the other affections and their resultant actions. In what way, then, must we regard the nature of this faculty and the important functions assigned to it?

A separ-
faculty.
Hutcheson.

It was left to Shaftesbury's disciple, Francis Hutcheson, to elaborate with thoroughness this conception of the moral sense as a separate faculty. Hutcheson did not make any important addition

to the ideas of Shaftesbury and Butler. But he worked them out more systematically, and in his last work, the 'System of Moral Philosophy,' the protest against the egoism of Hobbes has found expression in a complete theory of human nature, in which the "moral sense" is supreme, and the ends of conduct independent of self-interest. Hutcheson, too, keeps more closely than either of his immediate predecessors to the way of looking at human nature which is spoken of in this volume as "naturalistic." He rejects even more decidedly than Shaftesbury—much more so than Butler—any creative function of reason in determining the constitution and direction of the moral sense.¹ The questions thus arise—(a) What is the moral sense when not regarded as a rational determination of the ends of conduct? and (b) To what determination of ends or other distinction between right and wrong in action does it lead? On both these points there is a difference between his early 'Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue' (1725), and the more mature 'System,' published in 1755, eight years after his death.

Two questions regarding it

¹ "What is Reason but that sagacity we have in prosecuting any end? The ultimate end proposed by the common moralists is the happiness of the agent himself, and this certainly he is determined to pursue from instinct. Now may not another instinct towards the public, or the good of others, be as proper a principle of virtue as the instinct toward private happiness?" —Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 115.

(α) Nature of
this faculty:
not reason,

at first de-
fined as feel-
ing of pleas-
ure or pain,

Hutcheson is in earnest with the rejection of reason as a creative force. The moral sense is not, he says, a source of new ideas. Its objects are received in the ordinary ways by which, through "sensation and reflection," we come by our knowledge.¹ But just as we have a sense of beauty in the forms of sensible objects, so there is a moral sense given us from which, in the contemplation of our actions, we derive "still nobler pleasures" than those of physical sensation. This moral sense is "a determination of our minds to receive amiable or disagreeable ideas of actions."² So far, therefore, it seems to be simply a pleasure in the contemplation of certain actions which, we say, have "an immediate goodness." "By a superior sense," says Hutcheson, "which I call a moral one, we perceive pleasure in the contemplation of such actions in others, and are determined to love the agent (and much more do we perceive pleasure in being conscious of having done such actions ourselves) without any view of further natural advantage from them."³ The significance of this position is easily seen. It is not only meant to give a criterion of moral action; it is also a short cut to the conclusion that virtue is for our private interest. The disquieting suspicion that morality may involve a sacrifice of individual happiness

¹ Cf. *System*, i. 97; *Inquiry*, p. 124.

² *Inquiry*, p. 124.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

“must be entirely removed, if we have a moral sense and public affections, whose gratifications are constituted by nature our most intense and durable pleasures.”¹ The elaborate analysis of conduct and enumeration of the pleasures which various affections and actions bring in their train, which Hutcheson gave in his latest work, were thus unnecessary as long as the position was maintained that the moral sense is emphatically a pleasure or pain, and that the pleasures it gives are the most intense and durable we have.

There was only an apparent contradiction in this theory which placed the test of morality in a pleasure consequent upon moral action, and yet held that such actions were not performed from interested motives. In the spirit of Butler’s psychology, Hutcheson contends² that virtue is pleasant only because we have a natural and immediate tendency towards virtuous action; our true motive is “some determination of our nature to study the good of others;” and this, although not always immediately pleasant in itself, is yet succeeded by the calm satisfaction of the moral sense. The real weakness of Hutcheson’s position is the fatal one that he cannot show that it corresponds with facts, that the pleasures incidental to the moral sense out-

¹ *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (1728), p. xix.

² Cf. *Inquiry*, p. 140 ff.

weigh all others. Indeed, he defends his opinion in their favour only, in a way which reminds one of Mill's method in the 'Utilitarianism,' by making every juror stand aside unless he has pledged himself to morality.¹ It is open to any one, however, to hold that the pleasures of benevolent action and the "relish" of the moral sense are not of sufficient hedonistic value to make up for the restraints they put upon conduct and the enjoyments they oblige one to forego. Even if this position be not correct, it is merely a mistake in estimating doubtful quantities. The man who chooses the smaller pleasure will be the loser by his mistake, but we cannot say that the selfish man is to blame for not being benevolent, because the pleasures of benevolence and the moral sense are greatest, any more than we could blame the benevolent man for not being selfish, if selfishness should turn out on the whole to leave a greater hedonistic balance at the individual's credit.

afterwards
spoken of as
a judgment,

A more objective determination of the moral sense is afterwards given by Hutcheson. Without professedly changing ground, he ceases to speak of it as a mere feeling of pleasure, and calls it a judgment of approbation or disapprobation. "It is," he he says,² "a natural and immediate determination

¹ Introduction to Moral Philosophy, translated from the Latin, 2d ed., 1753, p. 43; cf. Essay on the Passions and Affections, &c., p. 128.

² System, i 58.

to approve certain affections and actions consequent upon them; or a natural sense of immediate excellence in them, not referred to any other quality perceivable by our other senses or by reasoning." Nor is this judgment of approbation consequent upon the feeling of pleasure the affection or action produces in us. The action is not "judged good because it gains to the agent the pleasure of self-approbation, but it gains to him this pleasure because it was antecedently good, or had that quality which, by the constitution of this sense, we must approve."¹ But, in attempting to make clear the nature of this judgment, Hutcheson seems to return, though not in so many words, to his earlier position. To seek a basis for the judgment in reason would have been to make the "moral sense" what Kant afterwards made it, simply practical reason. This, however, would have been a "metaphysic of ethics" inconsistent with Hutcheson's whole position. He had always opposed the narrowly intellectual view of morality in Clarke and Wollaston, and he had no conception of the function of reason which would admit of an interpretation of the judgment of approbation by an appeal to a rational determination, depending upon an idea conceived as inherent in the human constitution, and to be realised in action. The judgment, therefore, is referred to a "taste or relish"² for certain

but this judgment allowed to depend on feeling

¹ System, i 53.

² Ibid, i 59.

affections and actions, and this he takes no pains to distinguish from pleasure.

The analogy he seeks to draw between the moral sense and our other powers does not really favour a distinction of it from pleasure. "To each of our powers," he says, "we seem to have a corresponding taste or sense, recommending the proper use of it to the agent, and making him relish or value the like exercise of it by another. This we see as to the powers of voice, of imitation, designing, or machinery, motion, reasoning; there is a sense discerning or recommending the proper exercise of them."¹ That is to say, besides the sense of hearing, which has to do with sounds, there must needs be another sense which has to do with our way of hearing sounds; besides the sense of sight, which has to do with form and colour, there must needs be another sense which has to do with our way of perceiving form and colour; and so with every other activity, especially those which proceed from our "highest powers." A doctrine such as this sets no limits to the manufacture of additional senses. The whole view of human nature upon which it proceeds is one of meaningless complexity, which serves the one good purpose only of showing how much ethics has suffered from a defective psychology.

The mental objects or presentations which are distinguished from one another by the difference

¹ System, i. 59.

of their characteristic qualities, and which we therefore call colours, or sounds, or movements, are accompanied by varying degrees of pleasurable or painful feeling; and it is possible to hold that the moral sense is a name for such feelings following in the train of those complexes of presentations to which we give the name of actions, or of those other recurring complexes we call affections. This, practically, was the position with which Hutcheson started in the 'Inquiry.' Benevolence pleased us and selfishness pained us; just as the taste of sugar was pleasant, and that of wormwood disagreeable. Perhaps Hutcheson departed from this theory, because he saw that if conduct was made a matter of taste, there would be no sufficient reason for condemning selfishness any more than an unusual taste. He therefore relinquished, or seems to have relinquished, the view of the moral sense as a feeling of pleasure or pain; and under the influence, no doubt, of Butler, spoke of it as a judgment of approbation or disapprobation. But he fell back on his original theory by making this judgment depend on "a taste or relish," which only lends itself to interpretation as a peculiar feeling of pleasure.

The reflex nature of the moral sense is brought out more distinctly in the 'System' than in the 'Inquiry.' In his earlier work, Hutcheson had spoken of it as directly related to *actions*. But it was more consistent with his maturer thought

(p) The objects of the moral sense - first said to be actions;

terwards
, be affec-
ions,

to regard it as having to do with mental powers or "affections" in the first instance, and with actions only indirectly or mediately. "The object of this sense," he says,¹ "is not any external motion or action, but the inward affections or dispositions;" and this is made by him to account for the discrepancy which the deliverances of the moral sense show in regard to actions. It "seems ever to approve and condemn uniformly the same immediate objects, the same affections and dispositions; though we reason very differently about the actions which evidence certain dispositions or their contraries." This distinction is applied with unlimited confidence in its efficacy. By means of it he would explain the most fundamental differences in the moral code of men and nations. Thus people unacquainted with the industrial improvements which give the character of permanence to property, may "see no harm in depriving men of their artificial acquisitions and stores beyond their present use,"—that is to say, "no evil may appear in theft."²

But it is more important in another respect; for it enables the author to avoid the difficulty of finding any principle according to which the moral sense may be related to the empirical content of action. As long as the moral sense was simply spoken of as a feeling of pleasure, it could be conveniently regarded as the consequent of ex-

¹ System, i 97.

² System, i 93.

ternal actions. But if it is an internal sense distinct from pleasure, it is easier to relate it to what he calls our internal powers or affections than to action. The moral sense, then, is to be the regulator of all our powers; and by means of it Hutcheson attempts to reduce human nature to a scale of morality.

It is to be noted that, in the classification he offers,¹ what are commonly called the virtues of candour, veracity, &c, are not accounted virtues at all, but only immediately connected with virtuous affections: these are identified with the "kind" or benevolent affections, directed to the happiness of sentient beings. Within the latter there are two grounds of preference: the deliberate affections are preferred to the passionate, those which are more extensive in the range of their objects to the less extensive. With regard to the former ground of preference, the "moral sense" of the community has perhaps undergone some modification since Hutcheson's time, and looks upon enthusiasm with less suspicion than it formerly did. The other ground of preference ascribed to the moral sense refers not so much to the affection itself—which is the direct or immediate object of the moral sense—as to the way in which the affection is applied, the number of the objects to which it is directed. The affec-

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¹ System, i. 68 ff. With this may be compared the elaborate classification of motives, according to their moral quality, in Dr Martineau's 'Types of Ethical Theory,' ii. 176 ff

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s objects.

tion of benevolence is the same in nature whether its object be wide or restricted; though difference in this respect profoundly influences the actions to which it leads. The object approved or most approved by the moral sense is therefore, according to Hutcheson, utilitarian conduct, or rather, as he would say, the calm disposition leading thereto.¹ In this way he obtains a principle for determining the morality of actions; but only through the arbitrary assertion that this principle is immediately approved by the moral sense. The connection of the moral sense with an object such as universal benevolence could only be made out by showing a rational, or at any rate an organic union between individual sentiment and social wellbeing, and Hutcheson, like Shaftesbury, has no conception of attempting this in any other way than the traditional one of exhibiting the personal advantages of benevolent conduct, and the disadvantages that accompany selfishness.

Third
view of the
moral sense

Butler.

Both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson were often led astray by a tendency to interpret facts as they wished them to be, rather than as they were. Their view of the consequences of action was coloured by their optimism. Butler, too, in spite of the difference in his general attitude to the value of human life, was not altogether free from

¹ System, i 50.

a similar error. He thinks that Shaftesbury "has shown beyond all contradiction that virtue is naturally the interest or happiness, and vice the misery of such a creature as man."¹ But, in view of particular exceptions, or of any one not being convinced of "this happy tendency of virtue," he thinks it necessary to emphasise the "natural authority of the principle of reflection." Conscience is, he holds, a part of our inward nature; but it differs from the other parts of our nature inasmuch as it is not related immediately to an external object, but to the actions dealing with such objects, and to the dispositions leading to those actions. It is a principle of "reflex approbation or disapprobation," which is said to have equal respect to both public and private good. This tendency, however, would seem to be ascertained empirically. The deliverances of conscience are immediate judgments as to the morality of actions and affections (for Butler speaks of it as referring to both equally); and its reference to the ends which those actions or the exercise of these affections may ultimately tend to would, therefore, seem to be indirect.² Butler was careful, moreover, not to speak of it as an æsthetic

Conscience
an authori-
tative law,

¹ Sermons, Pref.

² Although it is not "at all doubtful in the general, what course of action this faculty or practical discerning power within us, approves . . . It is . . . justice, veracity, and regard to the common good"—Dissertation on Virtue.

or sensitive faculty, but as a judgment. It is not a feeling of pleasure, but the revelation of law.

and the
criterion
of morality.

The approval of conscience is thus made the criterion of morality. But a difficulty arises as to the way in which we are to regard the authority which conscience is said to carry along with it. Butler's utterances here commonly imply a teleological reference to an end implanted in human nature, and to be discovered by observing that nature—the realisation of the end being obligatory, because it is shown to be the purpose which the author of nature had in view in making man as he is.¹ The authority of conscience thus seems to be derived from the divine purpose which it displays. It carries within itself a claim to obedience; but the justification of this claim depends on a theological basis. And hence the question of the nature and origin of conscience is at once raised, in order to determine the legitimacy of its claim to be, rather than any other part of our constitution, a divinely-implanted guide.

Teleological
and jurat
views not
reconciled,
nor fully
developed

But more than one current of thought runs through Butler's ethical treatise. The theological reference is sometimes so used as to make the obligation to morality, and even the nature of morality, depend on the will of God: though hardly according to Paley's crude method of seeking in the external revelation of the divine com-

¹ Sermons, ii. iii.

mand a means of uniting the divergent interests of the individual and of society. In general, Butler's ruling idea is the idea of the system or unity of human nature, for which he was largely indebted to Shaftesbury's revival of the Platonic conception. Conscience is regarded by him as the expression of this unity. But its nature is never more deeply probed. Its deliverances are justified now by its supernatural mission, and now by the more prosaic fact that it leads to our individual interest¹—at any rate, "if we take in the future"—while it could not be recommended as a guide if it did not.² On one side, therefore, Butler tends to a form of theological utilitarianism, such as was common in his own day, and was afterwards formulated by Paley.³ On the other hand, his ethics more naturally allies itself with a different theory, in which the moral law is conceived as having its source in practical reason, and the naturalistic basis of ethics is definitely abandoned.

On the whole, it would appear that the psychological ethics worked out by Shaftesbury and his school occupies an insecure position between the view discussed in the two preceding chapters and that which ascribes to reason a function in the formation of objects of desire. Shaftesbury and his followers tried to strike out a middle course

⁴ The ethics of moral sentiment a mediating theory;

¹ Sermons, iii. v.

² Ibid, xi.

³ Cf. Jodl, Geschichte der Ethik, i. 192.

between the theory that ends of action may be determined by reason, and that which looks upon all desires as being desires for objects as pleasurable. They made the attempt to found a system of ethics on human nature, and they held that that nature could not be accounted for by the simple psychological analysis of the Epicurean school as then represented by Hobbes. On the other hand, they did not see their way to adopt the "rational" ethics only known to them in the abstract form it had received at the hands of Clarke and Wollaston. But their own theory of human nature requires a principle of harmony and co-ordination among the various impulses which they were unable to give a satisfactory account of. It may seem, however, that the idea of the development of man with which we are now familiar, may enable us to overcome the difficulties which formerly appeared insurmountable—showing the unity of human nature, and the tendency of its activity. The general course of evolution, to which all life has been subject, is thought to have brought about a harmony between individual and social feelings, as well as between individual and social interests, and thus to have removed the obstacles in the way of founding morality on the basis of Naturalism. It is, therefore, of importance to examine with care the ethical bearings of the theory of evolution.

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PART II.

THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION.

CHAPTER V.

THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORALITY.

To relinquish the individualistic theory of ethics does not necessarily imply a recourse to evolution. It may still be possible to rest the foundation of ethics on the state, without that view of the growth of the community and of its connection with the individual which the theory of evolution involves. This, as has already been pointed out, was, in part, what Bentham did; while an attempt—in some respects more elaborate still—to deduce morality from society was made by Hobbes. The theory of Bentham, and of his successor Professor Bain, is indeed partly individualistic, partly social.¹

¹ General characteristics of the theory of evolution.

¹ The social basis of ethics is emphasised by Professor Bain

In the former reference, ethics becomes a theory of prudence; in the latter, a part of legislation. With Hobbes, on the other hand, the identification of individual and social interests is supposed to be brought about by the absolute necessity, in order to personal security, of a supreme political power, into the hands of which all men have agreed to transfer their rights to all things. But both Hobbes and Professor Bain might have avoided obvious difficulties had they had the theory of evolution to assist them, and had they thought themselves justified in making use of it¹ For want of it the former has to explain morality and its binding force by means of the fiction of an "original contract", while the latter has to account by the associations of a few years for the harmony of feeling between the individual and the whole, and for the good of the community coming to be so faithfully reflected in the consciences of its

in his *Practical Essays* (1884), p. 155. "'How is society to be held together?' is the first consideration, and the sociologist—as constitution-builder, administrator, judge—is the person to grapple with the problem. It is with him that law, obligation, right, command, obedience, sanction, have their origin and their explanation. Ethics is an important supplement to social or political law. But it is still a department of law. In any other view it is a maze, a mystery, a hopeless embroilment."

¹ Without denying that it is possible to apply the theory of evolution to mind, Professor Bain holds that, as a fact, moral sentiment has not become organic and hereditary—"that there are no moral instincts properly so called."—*The Emotions and the Will*, 3d ed., p. 56.

THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION.

members. The theory of evolution, by its doctrine of the hereditary transmission of acquired modifications, gives a scientific basis for this existing solidarity between man and society.

The great consensus of opinion amongst those who are best qualified to judge—amongst those who alone are qualified to judge—may be regarded as having established the claim of the theory of evolution to give the most satisfactory account of all forms of natural life. And it may seem only advancing the theory a step further, or only developing one of its applications, to make it yield a complete explanation of human nature, mental as well as physical. If ethics, then, is to be founded on a “natural” basis, no theory would seem to be complete which leaves evolution out of account.

In general, the theory of evolution is an assertion of the unity of life, or, in its widest form, of the unity of existence. Progressive modifications and hereditary transmission of such modifications are, it is contended, sufficient to explain the different forms and species which life now manifests. The assumption is specially discarded that there are fixed differences between kinds of living things making it impossible for them all to have developed from simple germs, originally of like constitution, which have, in the course of time, become more heterogeneous and complex, and so given rise to the wealth of organic life. But this general doc-

an assertion
of the unity
of life,

trine, held (wholly or in part) in modern times by Kant, Wolff, and Lamarck, needed to be supplemented by a definite view of the way in which the progressive modifications took place; and this required to be established as a really operative cause, before evolution could receive scientific proof. This more special element of the theory was Darwin's contribution to the subject. Evolution, he showed,—and herein consists his theoretical advance on Lamarck,—has taken place by the “natural selection” of organisms, so modified as to fit them for survival in the struggle for existence. Organisms in which advantageous modifications have been produced tend to survive, and to transmit their modified structure to descendants, while organisms in which such modifications have not been produced, are less able to preserve their life and to hand it on to successors. Older types, it is true, remain, but only in circumstances in which their continued existence does not seriously interfere with the organisms which, in the struggle for life, have developed a structure better suited to their environment: when more perfect and less perfect forms cannot exist together, only the better adapted survive.

in first instance, historical,

The theory of evolution is thus primarily the history of an order of sequent facts and relations. It is an account of the origin or growth of things, which attempts to explain their nature and consti-

THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION.

tution by showing how they have come to be what they are. But, in so doing, it naturally reveals the method and tendency of this order. And it is by means of this its teleological aspect that we see how it may be possible for it not merely to trace the development of historical facts, such as the feelings and customs of men, but at the same time to make a more real contribution to ethics by pointing out the course of action to which human nature is adapted. It does not, like the old teleology, attempt to show that each thing has been formed with the design of subserving some particular purpose. On the contrary, it reverses this way of looking at things. The fitness of an organism to fulfil any definite end comes to be regarded as the result not of a conscious design, independent of the environment, but of the modifications produced on the organism through the necessity laid upon it by its surroundings of adapting itself to them or else disappearing. What the theory does show is, that adaptation to environment is necessary for life, and that organisms unable to adapt themselves pass away. Adaptation to environment will thus be implied in, or be an essential means towards, self-preservation and race-preservation, self-development and race-development. And should this preservation or development be looked upon as the end of conduct, the adaptation to environment it implies may help to define and characterise the end.

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Again: when an organism adapts itself to its environment, it does so by some modification being produced in its structure corresponding to the modified function required by the conditions of life. In this way, one organism increases in complexity in a certain direction, while another organism, in different circumstances, also develops a more complicated structure, though one of a different kind. Thus organisms, alike to begin with, become heterogeneous in nature through exposure to different surroundings. At the same time, by constant interaction with their environments, they become more definite and coherent in structure. Incipient modifications are developed and defined in different ways by different circumstances, and the parts of a living being are brought into closer reciprocal relations, and thus welded into a coherent organic whole. This is what Mr Spencer means when he says that evolution implies a transition from "an indefinite incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity":¹ the whole process being interconnected in such a way that these different aspects of it—definiteness, coherence, heterogeneity—increase together and imply one another. By this the inference would appear to be suggested that, if conduct is to harmonise with the conditions of evolution, this characteristic feature of it must be recognised in the ethical end.

¹ First Principles, 4th ed, p 380.

Distinction
of its his-
torical and
ethical
aspects

In saying this, I am perhaps anticipating results. But it is well to show at the outset how the essentially historical inquiry carried out by the evolutionists may suggest conclusions which are ethical in their nature. To some, indeed, it will appear superfluous to have spent even a sentence in suggesting a *prima facie* case for the ethical importance of evolution. If there is one subject more than another, it may be thought, which has secured a place for itself in the scientific consciousness of the day, it is the evolution-theory of ethics. Without question, the phrase has been received into the scientific vocabulary; but there is a good deal, even in the official literature on the question, to make one doubt whether it is always used with a distinct conception of its meaning. When reference is made to the "ethics of evolution," no more is sometimes meant—though a great deal more should be meant—than an historical account of the growth of moral ideas and customs, which may provide (as Mr Stephen expresses it) "a new armoury wherewith to encounter certain plausible objections of the so-called Intuitionists." This, however, would only affect the ethical psychology of an opposed school. The profounder question still remains, What bearing has the theory of evolution, or its historical psychology and sociology, on the nature of the ethical end, or on the standard for distinguishing right and wrong in conduct? The answer to this question

will be the "reconstruction" and "deeper change" which Mr Stephen holds to be necessary.¹ It is the ambiguity of the subject—or rather its twofold range—which has made the application of evolution to ethics look so obvious, and made a discussion of the easier question frequently do duty for a solution of the more difficult. The ethical writings of the evolutionists, indeed, often confuse the problems of history and theory in a way which presents the same difficulty to the critic as the works of the corresponding school in jurisprudence. In both, the writers seem disinclined fairly to put to themselves the question as to the kind of subjects to which so fruitful a method as that which has fallen into their hands is appropriate: what its conditions are, and whether it has any limits at all. Every one is now familiar with the evils of hypothetical history, and with the iniquity of the proverbial philosophic offence of constructing facts out of one's inner consciousness. The historical jurists deserve no little credit for the thoroughness with which this has been enforced by them; perhaps, too, the same lesson may be learned from the facts of the development of morality. But it may be questioned whether we are not at the present time more apt to confuse fact and theory in the opposite way: whether the science of law is not sometimes lost sight of in the history of legal institutions, and ethics in danger

¹ Science of Ethics, p. vi.

of being identified with the development of moral sentiments and customs.

We may naturally expect the theory of evolution to throw light on such questions as the growth of moral feelings and ideas, and of the customs and institutions in which morality is expressed and embodied. But to show the process morality has passed through in the individual mind and in society still leaves the question as to the end of conduct unanswered. It is necessary, therefore, to keep clearly before us the distinction between the historical and the ethical problem, if we would successfully attack the subject of the bearing of the theory of evolution on this fundamental question of ethics. To the theory of evolution we are indebted for the opening up of a new field of investigation—the historical treatment of conduct. But it is one thing to describe the way in which men have acted in the past. to determine the end for their action now is quite a different problem ; and there is no reason why the distinction should be overlooked. The interest which belongs to the history of morality is not solely nor mainly due to its bearing on questions beyond the historical sphere. That its results will not be without relation—and that of an important kind—to questions of theory may well be expected. But it can only tend to confusion if we treat the development of morality, in the human mind and in society, from a preconceived attitude—dogmatic

or agnostic — towards the central problem of ethics.

2 The development of morality
(a) historical psychology.

The way in which the theory of evolution is applied to ethical psychology is easy enough to understand in principle, though complex and obscure in many of its details. We have only to postulate that mental as well as bodily traits admit of modification, and that modifications once produced can be transmitted to descendants,¹ and it at once follows that sentiments and ideas leading to actions which promote life will be encouraged and developed by natural selection. Thus parental and filial feelings, once originated, may have been developed through those families and tribes in which they were strongest, presenting a more united, and therefore stronger, front against hostile influences. The feelings of tribal sympathy and patriotism, too, may have had a similar history. Those races in which they were strongest, would, other things being equal, obtain the mastery over and exterminate other races in which they were relatively weak. The compactness of the community would even be promoted by that fear of the political and of the

¹ It would seem that the transmission of mental qualities only takes place in the form of modified physical structure (cf. G. H. Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, 1st series, i. 164). But, if we regard it as established that every mental change has a structural modification corresponding to it, the possibility of mental evolution and inheritance presents no new difficulty.

religious control in which the feeling of obligation is said to have had its root. In general, benevolence and sympathy amongst a people give it a solidarity from which it derives a stronger position, so that in turn the benevolent and sympathetic feelings gain free scope to develop and expand.

But the working out of this theory is not without its own difficulties. In the first place, the factor in the theory of evolution which can be most clearly traced—the principle of natural selection—is not itself a source of change or of the production of new results. It is only the means by which advantageous changes are preserved and disadvantageous changes passed by. The initiative in these changes comes either from the unequal pressure of the environment or from some tendency to vary in the organism itself. Now, if we suppose certain moral relations and the feelings corresponding to them to exist in a society, and to tend to greater certainty and fulness of life on the part of those who possess them, such relations and feelings will be favoured by the operation of natural selection, and will gradually be assimilated into the tissue of the social organism. But this does not account for the origin of morality generally nor of any particular moral relation; it merely shows how, having been somehow originated, it has naturally come to persist. There are thus really two points to be considered in tracing the development of moral

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ideas—the question of origin and the question of persistence. The latter is accounted for by natural selection; the former must be brought under the obscure laws of variation, laws so obscure that variations in nature are frequently spoken of as if they took place by chance. These two questions are involved at each stage in the progress of morality. But it is at the initial stage that the question of origin is of greatest importance: when the attempt is made to show how, in the course of time, and by the aid of purely physical and biological laws, feelings and conduct, from being merely natural and reflex, have acquired a moral character—when, in a word, the moral is being evolved out of the non-moral. A difficulty comes to the front here which scarcely arises when we are simply tracing the various phases through which the moral consciousness has passed, and the various forms in which moral conduct and feelings have expressed and embodied themselves. The latter subject is obviously within the scope of the theory of evolution, if that theory applies to the processes of the human mind and society as well as to those of external nature. And, although each stage involves a modification to be accounted for not by natural selection, but by the laws of variation, yet the variation is within facts of the same order, and creates no more difficulty than the successive modifications of living tissue which have been implied

in the evolution of organic nature. But the transition from the non-moral to the moral is a transition to a different order of facts or—perhaps we should rather say—to a different way of looking at facts, and should not be assumed to be a process of the same kind and explicable by the same method of investigation as the passage from one fact to the similar fact which immediately follows it. It may be compared, perhaps, to the transition from the sphere of inorganic matter to that of life. At the same time, it is frequently maintained that we unduly limit the application of the law of evolution if we deny its power to show how morality has developed out of customs and institutions whose origin can be traced to purely natural or non-moral causes. And, for present purposes, it is sufficient to have pointed out that this does not necessarily follow from the admission that evolution applies to mental and social processes as well as to the facts of external nature. It is not my object to criticise any doctrine of the development of morality; but, starting with the position taken up with regard to it by the theory of evolution, to inquire what conclusions it may lead to as to the end of action.

A further difficulty has to be met by the theory of the development of morality, which is in a sense complementary of the initial difficulty encountered in differentiating the moral from the non-moral.

the develop-
ment of feel-
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ral selection.

This further difficulty awaits it at a subsequent stage of development when the extension and refinement of moral feeling seem to have gone on in circumstances where there is no room for natural selection to work. Thus it has been admitted that the feeling of sympathy, and the habitual exercise of mutual good offices among members of a community, strengthen that society, and make it fit to prevail in the struggle for existence over other similar societies, the members of which are not so much at one amongst themselves in feeling and in act.

But as benevolence and sympathy widen, and become less closely connected with a definite association of individuals, such as the family or tribe, and there ceases to be a particular body to the welfare of which these social feelings contribute, the operation of the law of natural selection becomes less certain. This law only tends to conserve and perfect the feelings in question, in virtue of the fact that the associations to whose good they lead are successful in the struggle for life over other associations the members of which are not animated by like feelings. The one association lives and expands, while the others are unable to maintain themselves against the encroachments of their neighbours, and thus fall to pieces. The law of natural selection, therefore, comes into play only when there are competing organisms struggling

against one another for the means of subsistence and development. Not only is it the case, therefore, that the sympathy which aids the weak who are unable to take care of themselves, does not seem to be of the kind that would contribute to success in the struggle for existence; but the more general and catholic our sympathies are, the less will the law of evolution help to preserve and develop them—because the less will they tend to promote the welfare of one rival association rather than that of another. Thus the growth of really unrestricted sympathy with men as men cannot have been promoted in this way. The “enthusiasm of humanity” which animated the early Christians, the self-renouncing brotherhood of Buddha, the *φιλανθρωπία* attributed to men like Xenocrates¹ who had freed themselves from the aristocratic prejudices of Athens, the “*caritas generis humani*” of the Stoics,—such feelings as these could not have been encouraged, any more than they could have been produced, by the operation of natural selection. For, however much they tend to elevate the human character, and to promote human happiness, they do not advance the welfare of one body of men to the exclusion of some other competitor in the struggle for existence.²

¹ Ælian, V. H., xiii 30.

² If conscience has no other function than that assigned to it by Clifford, Lectures and Essay, ii 169, “the preservation of

But, although the law of natural evolution cannot account, by survival of the fittest, for any progress made by universal benevolence, yet it may explain the value ascribed to the feeling of benevolence, when its object is the family or the community. Besides—as has already been pointed out—natural selection always implies an initiative got from elsewhere: it does not itself produce modifications; it only chooses out favourable ones and adds them together when produced. It always implies an independent modification of the organism, its part is to select the modifications best fitted to promote life. Hence the mere fact of benevolence being universalised is not in itself an anomaly on the theory of natural selection, any more than is the fact of its being extended from the family to the tribe. Only, the latter extension is one which it perpetuates, the former is not. No aspect of the theory of evolution seems able to account for an extension of the feeling of universal benevolence among different people or throughout different societies. This feeling has neither tended to promote the welfare of the race animated by it to the exclusion of other competing races—for there are no competing races whom it could affect—nor can it be shown that it makes the individuals possessing it fitter to wage successful

society in the struggle for existence," then it can never reach universal benevolence or prescribe "duties towards all mankind."

war against opposing forces, than other individuals.¹

Apart from such special difficulties, however, comparative psychology has shed a new light on the mental structure of the individual. The facts it brings forward show that the nature of the individual man cannot be explained without taking into account the relations in which he stands to society by birth, education, and business. He is, from the first, surrounded by, and dependent upon, other individuals, and by a set of established usages and institutions which modify his life; and he is connected with these in such a way that it is impossible to consider him as merely acted upon by them and influencing them in turn. He has been produced by, and has become a part of them. His physical and mental structure bears the marks of the same influences as those by which his so-called environment has been

Its result :
shows the
social nature
of the indi-
vidual.

¹ A difficulty of another kind is suggested by Professor Bain, who holds that the "pleasure of malevolence" is not only a real element in the human constitution, but greater than would be naturally called forth by the conditions and course of development. "It is remarked by Mr Spencer," he says, "that it was necessary for the progress of the race that destructive activity should not be painful, but on the whole pleasurable. In point of fact, however, the pleasure of destruction has gone much beyond what these words express, and much beyond what is advantageous to the collective interest of animals and of human beings alike. The positive delight in suffering has been at all stages too great"—*The Emotions and the Will*, p 66. So far from adopting this argument, however, I must confess myself still amongst the unconvinced regarding the "pleasure of malevolence."

formed. He is cell in the "tissue" of which the body social is composed. This was partly recognised, it is true, before the theory of evolution had been elaborated. But the organic nature of the social union is confirmed by that theory, and erected into a scientific view of human life.

5) Development of society.

Now the various sentiments which bring one man into mental union with others act with greatest facility when men are connected with one another by some definite mutual bond such as that which forms the family, the clan, or the nation. The individual's feeling of sympathy with his neighbours both promotes this social union and depends upon it. But it is characteristic of the theory of evolution to put the external aspect first—the social customs and institutions—and to evolve from them the corresponding sentiments and ideas. Not word or thought or power, it holds, is to be regarded as the origin of morality: "Im Anfang war die That." The whole composed of these units bound together by reciprocity of feeling and function is termed the "social organism"; and what has been called moral sociology shows the way in which the outward forms which express and embody morality have grown up and become part of it.

In this connection, the theory of natural evolution traces the process by which, from the rudimentary beginnings of society, the members composing it have gradually become more coherent amongst one another, related in definite ways instead of merely

by chance, and more differentiated in function. Certain rudimentary forms—such as the family (in its rudest structure)—and the corresponding instincts are presupposed. And from this basis the origin of institutions and customs, political, religious, and industrial, is traced. In developing these various customs and institutions, along with the corresponding sentiments, the course of social evolution has had the effect of gradually bringing out and cultivating those feelings and tendencies in the individual which promote the welfare of the organism, while other individual tendencies, hostile to social welfare, have been repressed. Not sympathy and benevolence only, but honesty, temperance, justice, and all the ordinary social and personal virtues, may have their natural history traced in this way—by showing how they have contributed to the life of the individual, or of the society, or of both¹ Through the operation of purely natural laws, the wicked are “cut off from the earth,” while the “perfect remain in it” and leave their possessions to their children. This is an obvious result of natural selection. For those communities are always fittest to survive in which each member, in feeling and in act, is most at one with the whole. The *tendency* of evolution seems to be to produce not merely an ideal but an actual identification of individual and social interests, in which each man finds his own good in that of the state.

¹ This subject is carefully discussed in Mr Stephen's ‘Science of Ethics.’

CHAPTER VI.

EVOLUTION AND ETHICAL THEORIES.

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BEFORE going on to inquire into the positive contributions to ethics which the theory of evolution has to offer, it is necessary to consider the relation it bears to the preceding individualistic systems of morals. It was by way of investigations in psychology and in the theory of society, that it first began to influence ethical thought. And, at first sight, it appeared to come as a natural ally of one of the opposed schools, dreaded by the side it opposed,¹ welcomed with open arms by that favoured with its friendship. But since the first shock of pained and pleased surprise, there have been rumours of dissension in the allies' camp; and the distribution of parties has now become a matter of difficulty. The doctrine of evolution, first seized upon for rebutting the arguments of the intuitional moralists, has been found to transform

¹ Cf. Miss Cobbe, in 'Darwinism in Morals, and other Essays' (1872), p. 5.

rather than to destroy their system, and the utilitarianism in whose interests the new controversial weapon was employed, seems to have been subjected to a parallel process of transformation. The bearing of evolution on egoism may appear to be even more fundamental. For the inheritance by an individual of the qualities acquired by his ancestors may be thought to establish scientifically the theory of the unity of the race, and, in doing so, to make the selfish system of conduct an anachronism.

It is not necessary to examine at any length the application of evolution to the theories which construct ethical principles on the basis of moral sentiment, because these theories have been found either to resolve themselves into a subtle form of egoistic hedonism, or else to rest their ethical system on a teleological conception, which transcends the "naturalistic" view of man. Evolution has its own explanation to give of the seemingly intuitive character of moral ideas—showing how their immediate necessity for the individual of the present day may be reconciled with their empirical origin in the mental history of the race. It attempts thus to supplant both egoism and intuitionism by the same doctrine of the organic union between individuals.

¹ On theories depending on moral sentiment or intuition.

The phenomena of conscience and the moral sentiments had been brought forward to show that the origin of morality was independent of the experience of the pleasurable or painful results of

action: that certain actions and traits of character were immediately approved and pronounced to be right by the individual conscience, and certain others as inexplicably but infallibly disapproved and pronounced to be wrong. This phenomenon of moral approbation or disapprobation had indeed been thought by some—as has been already seen—to be only a special feeling of pleasure or pain. Even as such, however, it pointed to a peculiar harmony or sympathy between the feelings of the individual and the fortunes of society. For the pleasure or pain of the individual was seen to be excited by actions and dispositions which might be shown to involve the common interests, but were without relation to his own.

Origin and
history of
moral senti-
ments and
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traced by
evolution.

Even on the “empirical” interpretation of them, such facts of the individual mind were in need of explanation; and the theory of evolution has taken in hand to show how the pre-established harmony grew up. The results of this explanation are, of course, not put forward as explaining the facts away, or depriving them of reality, but as enabling us to see their true place and bearing in the economy of human nature. In tracing the origin and history of the “altruistic” and “moral” sentiments of the individual, the theory of evolution has this end in view. It offers—so it is often said—terms of compromise between the “intuitional” and the “empirical” psychology of morals. It will

admit the immediate and intuitive character in the individual of the sentiments which older empiricism had tried to make out to be composite, growing up in each person out of the materials afforded by his environment, and the experiences to which he was subjected. The theory of evolution contends for an empiricism on a larger scale, which will more closely connect the individual with the race, and both with their environment.

The question thus arises, What bearing has this psychological or "psychogonical" theory on the ethical validity of moral intuitions and sentiments? It certainly does not follow that they are of no moral value, merely because their origin can be traced to simpler elements of experience. They would lose ethical importance only if it were first of all shown that their validity depended on their not being derived from, or compounded out of, other elements. As Professor Sidgwick says, "Those who dispute the authority of moral or other intuitions on the ground of their derivation, must be required to show, not merely that they are the effects of certain causes, but that these causes are of a kind that tend to produce invalid belief."¹

But what the theory of evolution has to determine with regard to moral intuitions or sensibilities would seem to be not so much their ethical validity or invalidity, as the range and

¹ *Methods of Ethics*, III. i. 4, 3d ed., p. 211.

manner of their ethical application. It attempts to show that particular moral beliefs or feelings have been originated and formed by certain external customs belonging to the conditions of social or family life. These customs have impressed themselves upon the mental structure, and reappear in the individual in the shape of organic tendencies to certain actions, or classes of actions, and of aversion to other actions, accompanied by a corresponding mental sentiment—or judgment—of approbation or disapprobation. Thus the individual comes instinctively to feel—or to judge,—“A ought to be done,” “B ought not to be done.” Now the evolutionist, as I conceive, does not proceed to infer that such judgments are invalid because he has shown how they originated—does not conclude (to use Mr Sidgwick’s words) that “*all* propositions of the form ‘X is right’ or ‘good,’ are untrustworthy;” but he does ask in what way the history of these judgments affects their application.¹

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social condi-
tions from
which they
may have
resulted,

(a) He recognises, in the first place, that all such judgments are the natural result of a certain social condition, and that there is, therefore, some probability that the same kind of social state could not continue to exist were those moral judgments

¹ Cf Professor F. Pollock, “Evolution and Ethics”—*Mind*, 1. pp. 335 ff. Apart from the bearing of a utilitarian test on inherited instincts, to which Mr Pollock refers, I have tried to show what meaning they will have for the evolutionist who judges them solely from the point of view of his theory.

habitually disregarded in conduct. They have resulted from a certain state of society, and have been assumed—after insufficient experience, perhaps—to be required for the stability of that state, so that every action opposed to these moral judgments will probably tend to weaken social bonds. But the evolutionist's conclusions are not restricted to such generalities. He may show that certain moral judgments or sentiments have had their origin from the habits of union between individuals, and of respect for the rights of property, which have obtained in every relatively permanent society, and which may therefore be inferred to be probably necessary for the continued existence of any community; that certain other sentiments or intuitions have descended to present individuals from customs which have not been so universal in the history of societies, although the communities possessing them have shown greater power of vitality than those in which they were absent; while others, again, may be traced to institutions which, from their occasional and unprogressive character, may be shown to be neither necessary nor beneficial.

The evolutionist will therefore contend that different degrees of value for the regulation of conduct belong to different moral intuitions or classes of them. If one class is habitually disregarded, he may assert that historical evidence goes to show that society will fall to pieces, and

and consequent difference in their value for conduct,

the life of man become, in the expressive words of Hobbes, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." The disregard of another class will probably lead to a more precarious existence, or one less filled with the experiences which make up life; while opposition to a third class, so far from being hurtful or dangerous, may remove unnecessary restrictions, and aid the development both of the individual and of society.

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(b) There is a second point which will also be recognised by the evolutionist. Although these intuitions have been derived, they are now organic, and their disappearance from the human mind as instinctive tendencies towards or against action can only be slow and painful. The process must involve a certain amount of loss: at the same time, it is not a process that can be easily avoided. As soon as the reason of the instinctive tendency is inquired into, it is weakened as instinct. We pass from the action itself to the end it is fitted to subserve; and, if the instinctive action is not the most appropriate, or has hurtful results, we have already reached the stage in which the instinct is checked, and begins to yield to action directed by a principle. Yet it dies out only gradually, and, so to speak, after a struggle. Nor does it seem possible to assert with confidence, as mitigating this struggle, that the strongest impulses will always be those which are necessary or advantageous to the existence of

ociety. For it is a common experience that the moral intuitions which lead to conduct that has ceased to serve a purpose, and the internal sanctions which follow disregard of them, are often even more powerful than those which protect such virtues as justice or veracity.

From the preceding argument it follows that it cannot be held that moral intuitions are invalid because evolved. The evolutionist will certainly go very far wrong, as Mr Sidgwick points out, if he maintains that a "general demonstration of the derivedness or developedness of our moral faculty is an adequate ground for distrusting it." Instead of holding that, if we succeed in tracing the origin of an intuition, it is thereby discredited, he will admit that the mere fact of our possessing any moral intuition shows that the habits of action from which it was derived have been permanent enough to leave their traces on the mental structure, and that the conduct to which it leads, like the custom from which it came, will not destroy society, but, on the contrary, will probably tend to its permanence. The general attitude of the evolution-theory to moral intuitions is therefore, after all, very similar to that which Mr Sidgwick has reached as a result of his elaborate examination of the maxims of common-sense. It is an attitude of trust modified by criticism. In both an appeal is made from the axioms themselves: in the one

Resultant
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case, to their historical genesis and the facts in which they originated, in the other, to the searching test of logical consistency, and their capability of being applied to conduct. But the theory of evolution, if it succeeds in tracing the origin of our moral intuitions, does seem to involve the abandonment of the old intuitional method which accepted them as rules of conduct from which no appeal could be taken.

2. Bearing
of the theory
of evolution
on egoism.

The theory of evolution transforms intuitionism by the way in which it connects the individual with the race. Its first effect upon egoism is similar. The nature of the individual man as now exhibited is widely different from that which the older individualistic theory used to deal with. The latter is typified by the marble statue to which Condillac¹ compares the percipient subject, as yet unaffected by sense-impressions. The variety of mental life which is actually met with is accounted for by the different kinds of experiences different men pass through; and the consequent difference in the sources of pleasure and pain accounts for the diverse lines of activity which human beings follow out. But the theory of evolution shows that human nature is infinitely varied, not only through the variety of circumstances, but through the variety of inherited dispositions. One individual is not

¹ *Traité des sensations, Œuvres* (1798), vol iii

merely connected with others through considerable similarity of experience built upon an equally characterless basis; but he is organically related to all the members of the race, not only bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, but mind of their mind. He is connected with others by a thousand subtly interwoven threads of emotion which enter into his life, and unite his desires and activities with the functions of the larger organism of which he is a member.

The theory of evolution has thus an important contribution to make to the question of the relation between egoism and altruism. It has remained for it to show historically how the individual is so connected with the community that the good, or the pleasure, of the one cannot be considered apart from that of the other. From the non-evolutionist point of view it was always open to show how the individual depended on society, how his wants could only be supplied by it, and how the security and happiness of every one were bound up with those of his fellows. The individualistic theory was thus able to give all sorts of egoistic reasons why people should indulge in what is now called altruistic conduct. Self was seen to be "a poor centre for a man's actions," and only chosen by the short-sighted person, who thereby missed both the good to himself that followed from his neighbours' well-being, and the peculiar pleasure of sympathy and

Relation
egoism to
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benevolent action. But the theory of evolution has shown how the two things have developed together in the race first, the actual solidarity between the individual and the whole; and secondly, the subjective reflection of the same fact, sympathy with the feelings of others. When we ask, therefore, whether it is our own pleasure (or good) or that of others that we ought to aim at, we are pointed to the gradual obliteration of the distinction between the interest and feelings of the individual and those of the whole. Were this completely accomplished, there need be no more question about the matter. If conduct with an egoistic motive or aim always resulted in altruistic equally with egoistic effects, and if altruistic conduct had always egoistic equally with altruistic consequences, it would even then be little more than vain subtlety to ask whether egoism or altruism was to be the real end of conduct. But if, in addition to the identity of interests, there were also an identity of motive or feeling,¹ the question would be no longer in place at all. For there would cease to be either a subjective distinction in motive between egoism and altruism, or an objective distinction in the courses of conduct to which they led. And it is just because this identification is manifestly incomplete — because

but not
completely

¹ It is to a condition of this sort that a phrase such as Clifford's "tribal self" (Lectures and Essays, ii. 111) would apply.

neither the interests nor the desires of the individual harmonise with any degree of exactness with those of his fellows—that we must examine how far the conception of the social organism is a true expression for the connection of individuals. social.

At most, the theory of organic evolution can make out that there is a tendency towards the identification of the interests of the individual with those of society. It cannot demonstrate a complete identification. The community has indeed been called an organism, and the individual spoken of as a cell in the tissue of which it is composed; but we must avoid pressing this analogy to the point of breaking. Among so many points of similarity between society and an individual organism, there is one essential distinction,—the social organism has no feelings and thoughts but those of its individual members—the conscious centre is in the unit, not in the whole; whereas, when we regard the individual organism and its constituent members, consciousness is seen to exist only in the whole, not in each several unit. The absence of a “social sensorium”¹ should, therefore, make us hesitate to identify the ends of individual with those of collective action. Every cell in the individual body has a life-history of its own, besides partaking of the life of the organism; and, did it possess the reason which “looks before and after,”

Difference
between the
individual
and social
organisms

¹ Cf. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, i 479

it might probably adopt an egoistic attitude, and object to the subordination of its private interests to the good of the whole. In the same way, the many individual lives which make up the social organism—since each of them possesses a separate consciousness—are apt to disregard the life of the larger whole whose members they are. Now what the theory of utilitarianism requires is, that the happiness or pleasurable consciousness of the community or of the race, not that of the individual, be made the end; and those who make egoism the end of ethics, commonly maintain that the general happiness is the end of politics¹. The individual is not indeed required to be entirely unselfish or “altruistic” in action. He is not altogether forbidden to seek his own things, nor enjoined to seek only the things of others; and evolutionist utilitarianism, indeed, would tell him to seek his own happiness in the happiness of the community. But the obvious remark must be borne in mind, that society, the social organism, cannot experience happiness. However it may resemble the individual organism in the manner of its growth, the modes of its activity, and even its relation to its component members, yet it cannot feel pleasure or pain as an individual does. The “happiness of the community” does not mean the happiness of the social organism, but is only a concise formula

¹ Cf. Barratt, “Ethics and Politics”—*Mind*, ii. 453 ff

for the aggregate happinesses of the individuals composing it.

When it is said, therefore—either as a political in respect of feeling or an ethical theory—that the happiness of society is the end for conduct, the end prescribed is altruistic rather than social. Its object is not an organism, but an aggregate of individuals. A certain organisation of society may lead to an increase in this aggregate happiness, and so be necessary for the attainment of the end, but if the end is happiness, the social organism and its wellbeing are no longer the thing cared for, but the greatest aggregate of pleasures on the part of its members.

So long, therefore, as the end is pleasure, it must have reference to individuals. The utilitarian may try to persuade the agent to seek the pleasures of others as if they were his own—requiring him thus to seek his end out of himself, and the circle of his own pleasures. And, while we continue to hold pleasure to be the end, the evolution-theory can go no further than this. It seemed to have made out an organic unity between different individuals, through which it might be possible to effect a reconciliation between the rival ethical principles of egoism and altruism. But the feeling of pleasure is just the point where individualism is strongest, and in regard to which mankind, instead of being an organism in which each part but subserves the purposes of the whole, must rather be regarded as a col-

lection of competing and co-operating units. It is true that the social factor in the individual life is brought into scientific cognisance by the theory of evolution. It shows the way in which his interests and feelings depend upon others. And if, through the influence of a political standpoint, or of some intuition of reason, a universalistic ethics has been already arrived at, it can bring forward the organic union of individual and society as a means of enforcing the social end upon the individual agent. In this way the theory of evolution makes a contribution to ethics at a critical point where the individualist theory failed. For ethics must not rest content with pointing out an end for conduct or standard of morality, without giving a reason to the individual why he should make this end his own—that is, developing a doctrine of obligation. In many current theories, notably in the common forms of utilitarianism, the two things are not necessarily connected, since the standard is fixed from the point of view of the whole, and obligation has reference to the individual. The development of morality may appear to show how the two standpoints can be connected. If it could be made out that the happiness of the community and of the individual are identical, a standard of morality which made the aggregate happiness the end might be regarded as carrying its own obligation within itself. politics and ethics would (on the

theory of
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hedonistic theory) be harmonised. And, in so far as evolution has brought the individual and society into closer reciprocal dependence, it has lessened the practical difficulty of bringing about this conciliation, or—to speak with the utilitarians—of making the standard of morality supply a doctrine of obligation. At present, however, the course of human development is far from having reached the point at which actual harmony between the race and each member of it is established; and it would therefore still be a subject for inquiry whether the theory of evolution could provide a basis for moral obligation, even were the moral standard or the end for conduct satisfactorily established. But, in determining this latter question, we find that the above psychological and sociological investigations have no longer the same degree of value as before. In the theory of obligation, every fact brought forward by evolution to show the harmony of individual and social welfare makes the way easier for establishing the reasonableness of the pursuit of social ends by the individual. But from these facts of past development we have also to determine an end for present and future action. And this question cannot be solved merely by showing how morality has developed, though that development may form an important part of the evidence from which our conclusions are to be drawn.

The harmony of interests and the harmony of (b) Limits to

complete
conciliation
of egoism
and altru-
ism

(a) con-
tinued exist-
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petition,

feelings required for the empirical reconciliation of egoism and altruism is a condition which needs only to be stated to show how far it is from being realised in present circumstances. The constant struggle involved in the course of evolution throws doubt even on its ultimate attainment. The rule has always been that the better-equipped organism asserts and maintains its supremacy only by vanquishing the organisms which are not so well equipped. Conflict and competition have been constant factors in development. The present circumstances of the individual have been determined for him by the war of hostile interests between different communities, and between different members of the same community, and his mental inheritance has been largely formed by the emotions corresponding to this rivalry. Perhaps the necessity for conflict has diminished with the advance of evolution; but it is still sufficiently great to make competition one of the chief formative influences in industrial and political life. And the causes from which the struggle of interests arises are so constant—the multiplication of desires and of desiring individuals keeps so well in advance of the means of satisfying desires—that it is doubtful whether the course of evolution is fitted to bring about complete harmony between different individuals. It would almost seem that the “moving equilibrium” in human conduct, in which there is

no clash of diverse interests, cannot be expected to be brought about much before the time when the physical factors of the universe have reached the stage in which evolution ends.

Besides, it does not do to speak as if the only alternative to egoism were a comprehensive altruism. Man is a member of a family, a tribe, a nation, the race. His altruism, therefore, may take the narrow form of family feeling, or it may extend to tribal feeling, or to patriotism, or even rise to devotion to humanity. And these do not merely supplement one another: they are often conflicting principles of conduct. Action for the sake of the family may frequently be most unsocial; the keen patriot ignores the rights of other peoples; the "citizen of the world" is too often a stranger to the national spirit. Further, when civilisation grows complex, the same man is a member of many intersecting societies—a church, a trade, a party organisation¹—and has to balance the claims which each of these has upon him. The sublation of egoism would still leave to be determined the different shares which these various social wholes have in a man's sympathies, and their different claims upon his conduct.

Any theory of society will show how the good of the individual is not merely a part of the good of the whole, but reacts in various ways upon the

(β) different and conflicting degrees of altruism.

(γ) the altruism of interest and the altruism of motive.

¹ Cf. Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 113.

organism of which he is a member. But, in the case of any one individual, the results of acts done for his own good (or pleasure), and the results of those done for the good (or pleasure) of the whole, do not correspond with any exactness, and often widely diverge. If, then, the individual is consciously aiming at his own good (or pleasure), it is—if we look from the point of view of individualistic ethics—only an incidental and fortuitous result of the action when it promotes the common good. When we recognise the social factor in the individual, this judgment must be modified. The evolution-theory shows how he has become so constituted that much that pleases him individually, must of necessity benefit society at large. But there are obvious limits to the harmony. The pleasure or interest of the individual is often the reverse of advantageous to society. It may be the case that in seeking his own private ends, he is yet, to use the words of Adam Smith, “led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.”¹ But, if so, the end is invisible as well as the hand that points to it. And the good of society can be said to be the natural and uniform consequence of the individual’s action, only when he consciously makes it his end. In a word, the true altruism—or, as we might call it, using a word appropriated to another

¹ *Wealth of Nations*, book iv. ch. ii.

purpose—the true socialism is when the good of others or of society is pursued for its own sake; and this is to be distinguished from the false or imperfect altruism, in which the same outward result is aimed at, because it is seen to be the most prudent way of promoting one's own good. Thus Mr Spencer's elaborate argument¹ to show that conduct of purely egoistic tendency, equally with conduct of purely altruistic tendency, is insufficient and self-destructive, does not reach beyond the external results of action, and leaves it possible for both end and motive to be still egoistic. If "morality is internal,"² the discussion proves no ethical proposition at all. The egoism of external prudence may indeed be transcended by recognising that the pleasures and pains of others are sources of sympathetic feeling in ourselves. But a subjective or emotional egoism remains. And if the fact that we "receive pleasure from the pleasure of another man"³ is our reason for seeking his pleasure, we shall cease to seek it when a means of greater pleasure offers. In human life as at present constituted, no secure principle of conduct can be based on the agreement of individual with social good; for, if they

¹ Data of Ethics, chap xiii.

² Stephen, Science of Ethics, p. 155; cf. Spencer, Data of Ethics, p 120.

³ Stephen, Science of Ethics, p. 226

diverge, as they often do, there is no standard left for determining their competing claims.

(8) altruistic
feelings
weak,

It will not do to divide all men, as Mr Stephen seems to do,¹ into two classes, typified by the reasonable and therefore sympathetic man who has struck a bargain with society to take "common stock of pains and pleasures," and the systematically selfish man who "must be an idiot." For most men belong to neither of those two classes: their bargain with society has not been fully completed, and can be withdrawn from temporarily when circumstances make withdrawal convenient, though this process cannot be carried on indefinitely without greatly weakening the sympathetic feelings. The majority of men are neither entirely sympathetic nor yet "systematically selfish": they are unsystematically sympathetic and unsystematically selfish. Such men have the sensibilities that give "leverage" to the moralist.² But it is futile to tell them to be more sympathetic, or entirely sympathetic. For sympathetic feelings cannot be produced at will: they can only come with that slow modification of the character brought about by conduct. Shall we then say that a man should in all cases of conduct prefer the pleasure of the whole or of others to his own pleasure? If a man were to do so, then perhaps, by consistent self-abnegation, altruism might become pleasant, and

¹ Science of Ethics, p. 263.

² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 442.

both the man himself and his descendants become more sympathetically constituted? This perfection of altruistic sympathies is looked forward to by Mr Spencer as characteristic of a subsequent—the final—stage of evolution. When that period comes, men will compete with one another for the few remaining opportunities of self-sacrifice.¹ At present, Mr Spencer argues, pure altruism is suicidal. The individual whose sympathetic nature is undeveloped may, however, go further, and ask what right we have to say that “the moral law” is “conformity to the conditions of social welfare,”² rather than to those of individual welfare? Evolution, it would seem, does not suffice to prove this proposition, which appears, on the contrary, to be a survival of the social or political way of looking at things inherited from the utilitarian theory. But the point to be proved is why I ought to adopt this standpoint when considering what the end of my action is to be. And this point stands in need of proof here as much as in utilitarianism, and seems almost equally destitute of it.

Feelings leading to altruistic conduct are undoubtedly possessed by the average man at his present stage of development. Yet the being who is able to reflect on the feelings possessed by him, and compare the characteristics of different emotional states, and the activities following from

and may be
restrained
by reflection.

¹ Data of Ethics, p. 253.

² Science of Ethics, p. 349

them, has already before him the possibility of transcending them. He is able to estimate their value in terms of simpler—or of other—feelings; and the man who rigorously does so by the test of personal pleasure and pain manifests the spirit of the egoistic hedonist—a spirit which the theory of empirical evolution does not seem able to exorcise.

(c) Tendency
of evolution
to supplant
egoism
Evolution
not the basis
of psycholo-
gical hedon-
ism,

At the same time the *tendency* of the evolution-theory is not to support but to supplant egoism. Neither the basis of psychological hedonism on which egoism is usually made to rest, nor the independent arguments which have been urged for its ethical theory, are drawn from the facts of development. The theory of evolution may, indeed, be made to suggest that non-hedonistic action has arisen out of hedonistic. "That all affections are generated by association with experienced pleasure—only that the association is mainly *ancestral* in the case of 'affections' proper. The dim remembrance of ancestral pleasures, the force of ancestral habit, produces that propension of which Butler speaks, disproportionate to (distinct) expectation and (personal) experience of pleasure."¹ But this view will be rejected by the pure egoist,² who must maintain that the pain of acting contrary to ancestral habit would in every case be

¹ F. Y. Edgeworth, *Old and New Methods of Ethics* (1877), p. 11.

² Cf. A. Barratt, *Mind*, iii. 280.

greater than the expected pleasure foregone by following it. According to the view suggested, all deliberate volition would still be regarded as hedonistically determined, though other motives than pleasure may affect action through having been inherited from cases of ancestral conduct in which they tended to personal pleasure. Even were it shown, however, that altruistic conduct has been developed out of egoistic, the fact of its development would not alter its present characteristic. If action now is not always moved by pleasure and pain alone, it becomes a question of merely historical interest to trace its genesis to conduct to which our ancestors were hedonistically impelled. The fact remains that the original simplicity of motive has been broken into, and something else than personal pleasure admitted to have sway. But it does not seem to have been made out that action in the early stages of human life was completely egoistic, any more than that it is so now. "From first to last," as Mr Spencer puts it,¹ self-sacrifice seems to have been involved in the preservation of each successive generation of individuals. We inherit propensities to action which have been evolved from an initial stage in which there was no conscious distinction between egoism and altruism, though both tendencies were present and were necessary for the continued exist-

¹ Data of Ethics, chap. xii.

ence of the species. The feelings inherited by the egoistic hedonist are assessed by him at their pleasure-value. But such feelings would never have been acquired by his ancestors, had they tested each germinal emotion in the same way, and so restrained self-sacrifice for offspring and fellow-men. Perhaps they did not clearly see or realise what their pleasure consisted in, or accurately distinguish it from family or tribal welfare; but, through this deficiency of imagination, the feelings were able to grow and perpetuate themselves, which have tended to the preservation and consolidation of society.

nor of
ethical
hedonism.

Nor can we gather from evolution any ethical argument leading to egoism as the principle or end for conduct, and it is worthy of remark that the proof attempted by the late Mr Barratt is unaffected by his recognition of the theory of evolution as applied to mind, depending on definitions and axioms which hold (if at all) for the individual man. Pleasure is defined by him as "that state of consciousness which follows upon the unimpeded performance (as such) of its function by one or more of the parts of our organism,"¹ and the good is forthwith identified with pleasure, by its being shown that it is a "state of consciousness," and that it "results from the due performance of function (as such)."² But the "due"³ performance

¹ Physical Ethics, p 12.

² Ibid., p. 17.

³ In the word "due" an idea of worth is involved Probably

of function" is itself a state or states of consciousness; and in it, not in any sequent or concomitant circumstances, the good may consist. The good, we may say, is not pleasure, but the *ἐνέργεια* of which pleasure is only the consequent or completion. This is not a mere question of words. For "due performance of function" cannot be measured by the resultant or accompanying feeling of pleasure: the most perfect functioning, just because it has become habitual, has often the slightest accompaniment of pleasant feeling. The way in which the argument is put in 'Physical Ethics' is thus well fitted to bring out the fundamental antithesis between ethical systems according as they place the good in the active element of function, or in the passive element of pleasurable feeling which accompanies functioning. The theory of evolution seems to have led many of the writers who have applied it to ethics to the other side of the antithesis than that adhered to by Mr Barratt. They recognise ethical value as belonging to "due performance of function," rather than to the pleased states of consciousness which follow; and in this way their theory leads them beyond hedonistic ethics.¹

Mr Barratt meant by "due performance" one which made the faculty correspond with its medium (cf *Physical Ethics*, p. 9); but this introduces a new standard of value.

¹ The transition involved in passing from "pleasure" to "performance of function" or "life" as the end of conduct, may be illustrated by the following passage from Mr Pater's 'Marius

3 Bearing
of the theory
of evolution
on utilitari-
anism

It has been argued that the theory of evolution is, in tendency, hostile to the egoistic principle. Had egoism been consistently recognised and acted upon during the course of human development, the features of social life which most promote co-operation and progress would never have become persistent. But the same objection cannot be urged against universalistic hedonism. It is true that this has not been the end consistently aimed at in the past. Those from whom our social instincts are inherited cannot be credited with having had either the general happiness or social evolution in view. Society and institutions furthering the common good were not the work of primitive utilitarians plotting for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. They have come down to

the Epicurean' (1885, i 163) "Really, to the phase of reflection through which Marius was then passing, the charge of 'hedonism,' whatever its real weight might be, was not properly applicable at all. Not pleasure, but fulness of life, and 'insight' as conducting to that fulness—energy, choice and variety of experience—including noble pain and sorrow even—loves such as those in the exquisite old story of Apuleius, such sincere and strenuous forms of the moral life, as Seneca and Epictetus—whatever form of human life, in short, was impassioned and ideal. it was from this that the 'new Cyrenaicism' of Marius took its criterion of values. It was a theory, indeed, which might rightly be regarded as in a great degree coincident with the main principle of the Stoics themselves, and a version of the precept 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might'—a doctrine so widely applicable among the nobler spirits of that time; and as with that its mistaken tendency would be in the direction of a kind of idolatry of mere life, or natural gift or strength—*l'idolâtrie des talents*."

us from times when social organisation was forced upon men by the rude logic of facts which exterminated tribes in which the bond of union was weak; and they have been gradually modified by the pressure of external circumstances and the growing influence of mental conceptions of what is best. But the adoption of general happiness as the end of action would not have had the same effect on social evolution, as the adoption of personal happiness as the end would have had. It would have aided and not have hindered the growth of the feeling of unity among the members of a tribe or state, as well as have led to the recognition of the individual as subordinate to the social organism. It may thus seem quite natural to look to utilitarianism as giving the end for reflective action, and yet to hold along with it what is loosely called the ethics of evolution.

But this first attitude of evolution to utilitarianism was not fitted to be permanent; and the "start"¹ Mr Spencer got on being classed with anti-utilitarians must have been repeated in the experience of other moralists as they found themselves drifting from their ancient moorings. Mr Spencer's difference from the utilitarians is not such as to lead him to reject or modify their

has led to
its modifi-
cation

¹ "The note in question greatly startled me by implicitly classing me with anti-utilitarians. I have never regarded myself as an anti-utilitarian"—Mr Spencer's letter to J. S. Mill, printed in Bain's *Mental and Moral Science*, p. 721.

principle. He maintains, as strongly as they do, that "the ultimately supreme end" is "happiness special and general"¹ But he disagrees with them in method, holding that, owing to the incommensurability of a man's different pleasures and pains, and to the incommensurability of the pleasures and pains of one man with those of others, coupled with the indeterminateness of the means required to reach so indeterminate an end, happiness is not fitted to be the immediate aim of conduct.² But another method is open to us. For "since evolution has been, and is still, working towards the highest life, it follows that conforming to those principles by which the highest life is achieved, is furthering that end."³ It is possible "to deduce, from the laws of life and the conditions of existence, what kinds of action necessarily tend to produce happiness, and what kinds to produce unhappiness."⁴ Greatest pleasure, that is to say, is the end. But it is so impossible to compare different kinds of pleasure, different people's pleasure, and different means for obtaining a maximum of it, that it is not a practical end for aiming at. No doubt is expressed that greatest happiness is the ultimate end; although no good reason is given for holding that it is. But it is an indeterminate

¹ Data of Ethics, p. 173; cf. p. 30

² Ibid, pp. 154, 155

³ Ibid, p. 171.

⁴ Letter to J. S. Mill, in Data of Ethics, p. 57.

end, and needs to be interpreted by the course of evolution which is held to tend to it. It is not too much to say, therefore, that Mr Spencer is only nominally a utilitarian. His ethical principles are not arrived at by an estimate of the consequences of action, but by deduction from the laws of that "highest life" which is now in process of evolution. This alliance between evolutionism and hedonism will be examined in the following chapter. At present it is necessary to consider the reasons which have led other evolutionists to look upon the new morality as superseding the utilitarian end.

Mr Spencer's "dissent from the doctrine of utility, as commonly understood, concerns," he tells us,¹ "not the object to be reached by men, but the method of reaching it." In other writers, however, the theory of evolution has not only supplanted the method of utilitarianism, but also led to a modification of its principle. The objections they have taken to it may perhaps be summed up by saying that they consider utilitarianism to look upon conduct from a mechanical, instead of from an organic point of view. It prescribed conduct to a man as if he were a machine with a certain kind and quantity of work to turn out. His nature was looked upon by it as fixed, and his social con-

¹ Letter to J. S. Mill, in Bain's *Mental and Moral Science*, p. 721.

Ideal of
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ditions as unvarying; and the ideal set before him was therefore unprogressive—something that he was to do or to get, not something that he was to become. “If consistently applied,” it has been recently argued, “utilitarianism seems irrevocably committed to a stereotyped and unprogressive ideal.”¹ According to Mr Stephen, it “considers society to be formed of an aggregate of similar human beings: The character of each molecule is regarded as constant.” It can, therefore, give a test which is “approximately accurate” only, which does not allow for the variation of character and of social relations.² To the same effect Miss Simcox maintains that it “might pass muster in a theory of social statics, but it breaks down altogether if we seek its help to construct a theory of social dynamics.”³ These writers do not seem to have made it quite clear, however, in what way utilitarianism assumes a stationary condition of human nature, and so formulates conduct in a way unsuited to a progressive state. To say simply that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the end, is not in itself inconsistent with a progressive state of human nature. It is true that, in all the enthusiasm for and belief in progress to be seen in a writer such as J. S. Mill, there is a con-

¹ J. T. Punnet, “Ethical Alternatives”—*Mind*, x. 95

² *Science of Ethics*, p. 363.

³ *Natural Law : An Essay in Ethics* (1877), p. 101.

stant goal always set to it in the possible maximum of pleasant feeling. It would not have been inconsistent for him, however, to look upon human nature as capable of developing new susceptibilities for pleasure. Progress is made by increasing the amount of pleasure actually got. And so far, the ideal itself is certainly fixed, while progress consists in its gradual realisation. But there is no special virtue in having an ideal which is itself progressive. A progressive ideal simply means an ideal which is incompletely comprehended, and the comprehension of which proceeds gradually with its realisation. At any time the definition of such an ideal can only be tentative with the actual assimilation of character to it, the intellect comes to grasp its nature with increasing clearness. I do not myself think that we can expect to have more than such a tentative and progressive comprehension of the moral ideal of humanity. But we must not take objection to a theory because it gives at once a clear and definite view of the final end of conduct though we must not refrain from inquiring how the end is known.

But the bearing of the objection to utilitarianism becomes apparent when we try to give some definite meaning to the end greatest happiness. If we are content to receive it as simply a very general—or rather abstract—expression for our ideal, nothing need be said, except to put the question, which has

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been already asked, How we came by such an ideal? The difficulty arises when we attempt to apply the ideal to practice. With men of fixed character in an unchanging society, our way might be comparatively clear. But, when both character and social relations vary, and their variation extends to susceptibility to pleasure and pain, and depends on the actions adopted to obtain the end, utilitarianism may well appear to be without a principle by which to determine between different kinds of conduct. To an objection similar to this, but taken from the old point of view, that we have no time before acting to sum up the pleasurable and painful consequences of our actions, Mill replied that there had been "ample time—namely, the whole past duration of the human species"¹—in which to estimate the felicitic results of conduct. The variability of faculty and function makes this answer lack convincing power. Yet, perhaps, we are apt at present to disregard the real value of this collective experience of the race. True, human nature is not a constant; yet certain of its qualities are persistent and constant enough not to leave us in doubt as to whether, say, murder and theft are beneficial or injurious to happiness. There are at least certain actions, and, still more, certain abstentions, upon which human security—the basis of happiness—depends. But it would seem that those "secondary laws"

¹ Utilitarianism, p. 34.

may be more properly regarded as conditions of life than means to pleasure.

The difficulty, however, comes most clearly to the front when we attempt to define the maximum, and that not for an individual or generation only, but for the race. It is not happiness merely, but greatest happiness, that is the utilitarian end. Is there any way, then, of determining how the maximum of happiness is to be obtained for generations whose characters, though inherited from present individuals, may be modified almost indefinitely? The very existence and numbers of these future generations are problematic; and Mill, as is well known, spent much of his energy in trying to convince the present generation to restrict the numbers of the next. Even on the fundamental question as to whether happiness is to be obtained by the restriction of desires or by the satisfaction which leads to their recurrence and increase, no principle can be extracted from utilitarian ethics. The theory of evolution has shown how desires may be uprooted in the character of the race, though they remain to the end in the present individuals; but in each case utilitarianism would require us to sum up and estimate the relative advantages of renunciation and satisfaction,—a problem which the modifiability of human character seems to make impracticable. Thus, even if certain rules of living may be ascertained, and justified by the utilitarian

and a maximum of it.

principle, it would seem that the end of greatest happiness for the race of man, or the sentient creation generally, must remain "abstract" There seems no principle through which it may be applied to conduct — no hope of an accurate estimate of results — when the variability of the individual and of social relations is taken into account.

Objection
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Connected with this is the assertion that morality must have an inward, not an external standard. The evolutionists are inclined to condemn utilitarianism as a theory of consequences, dealing solely with work produced. According to Mill, "utilitarian moralists have gone beyond almost all others in affirming that the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent."¹ And this seems to be just what evolutionism objects to. Even the worth of the agent is, according to utilitarianism, only a tendency to perform the actions called moral: "a good or a bad disposition" is said to be "a bent of character from which useful or from which hurtful actions are likely to arise."² Against this view Mr Stephen maintains that "the attempt to secure an absolute and immutable moral law in its external shape must be illusory. The moral law can be stated unconditionally when it is stated in the form 'Be this,' but not when it is stated in the form 'Do

¹ Utilitarianism, p. 26.

² Ibid, p. 27 n

this.'"¹ This, however, appears to express the matter in a way not free from difficulty. The organic view of conduct will object not only to considering action apart from character, but also to considering character apart from action. We must treat conduct as a whole: and, in order to do so, we must treat it as both arising out of and forming character; and we must treat character not as mere potentiality, but as it realises itself in conduct. The weakness of the utilitarian theory is its method of treating actions merely in respect of their results: the evolutionist must show how results are connected with motives,—how character and conduct are different aspects of a whole.

The difference of the evolutionist view from utilitarianism comes out at another point. The latter places the standard and test of conduct in its effects on the sensibility. The best is that which brings most pleasure. Utilitarians are now, for the most part, ready to admit that, to be in earnest with their theory, they must reject Mill's attempt to distinguish qualities among pleasures. "If morality is to be defined by happiness, we must, of course, allow all kinds of happiness to count, and to count equally so far as they are actually equal. We must reckon the pleasures of malevolence as well as those of benevolence."² Of his own pleasures—of the relative amounts of pleasure he gets from various sources

(c) and as related solely to sensibility,

¹ Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 385.

² *Ibid.*, p. 361.

—each man is the final judge. One man prefers “push-pin” to poetry, another poetry to “push-pin”; and neither has a right to call the other mistaken. If we are to aim at the greatest maximum pleasure, therefore, we must not strive for what are commonly called “high” pleasures rather than “low” pleasures, except as greater in intensity. If we must have a standard, the judgment of the *φρόνιμος* for which Mill contended must be superseded by the judgment of the average man. If pleasure is the only end, and satisfaction is simply another name for it, then it is plainly incorrect to say that “it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.”¹ As has been urged from the evolutionist point of view, “there is no common measure of happiness to enable us to say that the more perfect being enjoys more of it than the less.”² There seems one way only in which utilitarianism can bring its moral ideal into harmony with the upward tendency claimed for itself by evolutionist ethics—and that is, by maintaining that the pleasures incident to what are regarded as the higher functions are the pleasures which excel others in respect of “fecundity”. they are the source of future pleasures, and are frequently exclusive even in their present enjoyment. The difficulty in making this assertion is just that these

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¹ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 14.

² Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 101.

“higher” pleasures are but slightly appreciated by the majority of men, and can hardly be said to be pleasures for them at all. But here the theory of evolution, whose adherents have been acting the part of the candid friend to utilitarianism, must come to its aid, and admit that human nature may be so modified in the future as to allow of the “highest” becoming also the “greatest” of pleasures. The argument in the mouth of the utilitarian is perhaps a somewhat arbitrary one, since it could be applied equally well to any class of pleasures. The notion of “higher,” as applied either to conduct or to pleasure, has been accepted from current moral opinion. But the theory of evolution has set itself to explain this notion, and to develop a theory of morality in harmony with its own scientific positions, and free from the defects which it has found in other systems. How far it contributes to the determination of the ethical end will form the subject of investigation in the following chapters.

CHAPTER VII.

HEDONISM AND EVOLUTIONISM.

1 Alliance
of evolu-
tionism and
hedonism
effected in
two ways .

THE alliance between Evolutionism and Hedonism may be arrived at from either of the two points of view which are being brought into connection : may be either an attempt to bring the hedonistic end into the definite region of law revealed by the evolution of life ; or may result from the endeavour to give clearness and persuasiveness to an ethical end which evolution itself seems to point to.

(a) greatest
happiness to
be obtained
by conform-
ing to laws
of life or of
evolution ;

The former point of view is represented in Mr Spencer's rejection of empirical utilitarianism, and substitution for it of a practical end which is not enunciated in terms of pleasure. Happiness is still regarded by him as the supreme end ; but the tendency to it is not to be adopted as the end in practical morality. There are certain conditions to social equilibrium which " must be fulfilled before complete life—that is, greatest happiness—can be obtained in any society." ¹ Thus the form of " rational utilitari-

¹ Data of Ethics, p. 171.

anism" which he endeavours to establish "does not take welfare for its immediate object of pursuit," but "conformity to certain principles which, in the nature of things, causally determine welfare."¹ Having deduced "from the laws of life and the conditions of existence what kinds of action necessarily tend to produce happiness, and what kinds to produce unhappiness," we are to recognise these deductions "as laws of conduct . . . irrespective of a direct estimation of happiness or misery."² The assumption is thus distinctly made that the tendency of life is to happiness, and that the laws of its evolution yield practical principles by following out which the greatest happiness may be obtained, without attempting the impossible task of estimating directly the felicific and infelicitic results of conduct.

Starting with the evolutionist point of view, but with an opposite estimate of the relative value for practice of the ends supplied by evolutionism and by hedonism, a like identification of them might seem advisable. The "increase of life" to which evolution tends may be regarded as not merely an account of the actual process of existence, but as a principle of action for a conscious being. In this way some such ethical imperative as "Be a self-conscious agent in the evolution of the universe"³ may be formulated. Yet as the "evolution of the

(b) ethical
end of
evolution
interpreted
by pleasure.

¹ Data of Ethics, p. 162.

² Ibid., p. 57.

³ Cf. A. Barratt, in *Mind*, ii. 172 n.

universe" is a somewhat large conception, and its laws are not clear to every one, it may seem necessary that the end should be explained by translation into better-known terms. And this may be done if the conduct which promotes life most is, at the same time, the conduct which increases pleasure most. In this way, although the ultimate end is life, or, in vaster phrase, "the evolution of the universe," the practical end is pleasure. The moral value of conduct will depend on its tendency to increase the balance of pleasure over pain. The ethics of evolution will be reduced to hedonism.

This way of determining the evolutionist end is put forward as a logical possibility rather than as representing the views of any party. The contribution which the theory of evolution has to offer towards the determination of the ethical end, has not yet received that definite expression which would justify our passing by any logical interpretation of it, on the ground of its not being actually adopted by ethical writers. Yet it would seem that the above point of view is not altogether foreign to evolutionist morality. The preservation or development of the individual—or of the race—which is put forward as an expression both for the actual course of evolution and the subjective impulse corresponding to it, is often assumed to agree at each step with the desire for pleasure, and, when the stage of reflective consciousness is reached, to be

identical with the pursuit of a maximum of pleasure.¹ In this way it is assumed that the preservation and development of life tend always to pleasure, and that the end or tendency of evolution is being fulfilled when the greatest pleasure is wisely sought. It is therefore necessary to inquire how far the correspondence between life and pleasure, or between development and pleasure, actually holds, that we may see whether it is possible for the one to take the place of the other in determining the end for conduct

Now it is argued, from the point of view of evolution, that, taking for granted that pleasure motives action, the organisms in which pleasurable acts coincided with life-preserving or health-promoting acts must have survived in the struggle for

2. Evolutionist argument for concomitance of life and pleasure

¹ As illustrating this I may refer to G. v. Giżycki, *Philosophische Konsequenzen der Lamarck-Darwin'schen Entwicklungstheorie* (1876), p. 27. "Wir haben oben die Erhaltung und Förderung des Lebens des Individuums und der Gattung als das eine Ziel der Einrichtung des geistigen Organismus gekennzeichnet." P. 58: "Auf das Streben nach in sich befriedigtem psychischen Leben [that is to say, pleasure] sind alle animalen Organismen angelegt." In his popular essay, 'Grundzüge der Moral' (1883), Dr. Giżycki's principle and method are utilitarian. With the above may be compared Guyau, *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction* (1885), p. 15. "L'action sort naturellement du fonctionnement de la vie, en grande partie inconscient; elle entre aussitôt dans le domaine de la conscience et de la jouissance, mais elle n'en vient pas. La tendance de l'être à persévérer dans l'être est le fond de tout désir sans constituer elle-même un désir déterminé."

existence at the expense of those organisms whose pleasurable activity tended to their destruction or to the hindrance of their efficiency.¹ The assumption in this argument, in addition to the constant postulate of natural selection, is simply that pleasure is a chief motive of action; the conclusion to which it leads is, that there is a broad correspondence between life-preserving and pleasurable acts—that the preservation and development of life are pleasurable. It is necessary to examine with care the validity of this important argument with reference to the attacks that may be made on it from the pessimist point of view; and, if its doctrine of the correspondence of life and pleasure is not entirely erroneous, to inquire further whether this correspondence can be made to establish an end for conduct, in accordance with the theory of evolution, by measuring life in terms of pleasure.

Objections to this argument.

What then is to be said of the supposed "conflict between Eudæmonism [Hedonism] and Evolutionism" which v. Hartmann² opposes to the optimist doctrine that evolution has tended to make life and pleasure coincide?

¹ Spencer, *Data of Ethics*, p. 82 f; *Principles of Psychology*, § 125, 3d ed., i. 280, Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 83. The simplicity of this argument will be appreciated if we consider the difficulty Comte experienced in trying to reach a similar conclusion. See *Positive Philosophy*, Miss Martineau's translation, ii 87 ff.

² Cf. *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins*, pp. 701, 708.

The problem of Pessimism resolves itself into two questions which admit of being kept distinct: (a) The first is, Does life on the whole give, or can it give, a balance of pleasure? This is the fundamental question of the value of life as put by those, whether optimists or pessimists, who assume that "value" means "pleasure-value." If it be answered in the negative, the hedonistic ideal must be the reduction of the adverse balance to the zero-point of feeling striven after by Eastern ascetics, but, to all appearance, obtained only and most easily by death.¹ (b) The second question is, Does the evolution of life lead to an increase of pleasure and diminution of pain? This is the question brought into prominence in recent discussions, and of most importance for the present inquiry; and upon an affirmative answer to it Evolutionist Hedonism is plainly dependent. To both questions v. Hartmann gives an answer in the negative.

(a) If the pessimist view of life is correct, Mr Spencer holds,² then "the ending of an undesirable existence being the thing to be wished, that which causes the ending of it must be applauded." And this is so far true, though not necessarily true in the way Mr Spencer thinks. For this undesirable existence cannot, perhaps, be brought to a final conclusion merely by ending the individual life: this

(a) that life cannot bring more pleasure than pain;

¹ Cf. Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 3d ed., p. 127.

² *Data of Ethics*, p. 26.

would only leave room for other individuals to fill the vacant places. Annihilation is the end not directly for the individual, but for the race. Not life itself, according to Schopenhauer, but the will to live, is to be killed in the individual man. Even this code of morals, Hartmann thinks, is a remnant of the false, pre-evolutionist individualism, and would hinder the course of the universe, by leaving the game to be played out by the remaining individuals whose wills were not strong enough to curb or kill themselves. It is a mistake to think that the will to live which pulses through all existence can be annihilated by the phenomenal individual. The individual's duty is not to seek for himself the painlessness of annihilation or passionless Nirwâna, but to join in the ceaseless painful striving of nature, and, by contributing to the development of life, to hasten its arrival once more at the goal of unconsciousness. The self-destruction, not of the individual will, but of the cosmic or universal will, is the final end of action.

Apart from the metaphysical view of things with which this estimate of the value of life is connected, and which may be regarded perhaps as its consequent rather than its cause,¹ the pessimist doctrine has a double foundation, in psychology and in the facts of life.

¹ Cf. Vaihinger, Hartmann, Dühring und Lange (1876), p. 124

Psychologically, it seems to be best supported (a) from the negative nature of pleasure, by Schopenhauer's doctrine of will or desire as an incessant painful striving, pleasure being merely the negative of this pain, and always coming short of completely satisfying it. But this position involves a double error in psychological analysis, and is relinquished even by Hartmann, though he still regards pleasure as in all cases satisfaction of desire. Desire is itself merely a secondary or derived fact in human nature, consequent on the inhibition of volitional energy.¹ The pleasures we call passive are independent of it; and those which attend upon activity, but are not themselves part of the end of action, are also enjoyed without being striven after in order to satisfy a want. Further, it is a mistake to look upon the pleasure of attainment as a mere negation of the pain of desire. The painful element in desire comes from the inhibition of the attempted realisation of an ideal object. In unsatisfied desires, it is true, the pain is in proportion to the strength of the restrained longing. But, if the inhibition is overcome, the pain is not equal to the strength of the desire, but only to the amount of opposition that has to be conquered in satisfying it. Hence, not only are there other pleasures than those of satisfied desire, but even the pleasure got from such satisfaction is something more than a mere recompense for the pain accompanying the desire

¹ Cf. Sully, *Pessimism*, p. 216.

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The support got by pessimism from the facts of human life is more difficult to estimate at its true value. It is obvious that pleasure and pain are intermingled in almost every experience; and the proportion in which they are mixed varies greatly in different circumstances and according to the susceptibilities of different persons. If we ask a number of people whether life is on the whole pleasant to them, not only do we receive a variety of answers which it is hard to sum up and average, but the answers we get are apt to reflect the feeling of the moment rather than to represent an impartial estimate of the pleasure and pain of a lifetime. Thus experience seems unable to give us a trustworthy answer as to the average pleasure-value of life; but, if its verdict is correct, that to some life is pleasant, though to many painful, this shows that a surplus of pain does not follow from the nature of life, and thus destroys the position of thoroughgoing pessimism, which looks upon this as the worst of all possible worlds.

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(b) It may still be maintained, however—and this is the position which chiefly concerns us here—that the course of evolution does not tend to increase the pleasure in life at the expense of the pain in it, and that, therefore, even although pleasure and evolution may both of them be possible ends of conduct, they are ends which point in different directions and lead to different courses of action.

It is necessary for the evolutionist who holds that the development of life does not tend to increased pleasure, to meet the argument already adduced¹ to show their correspondence. Nor does that argument seem to be altogether beyond criticism. To compare progress or development with pleasure, we ought to know exactly what is meant by both terms. Yet it is impossible to have a clear notion of progress without an idea of the end to which it tends, and this has not yet been obtained. It is largely on account of the difficulty of obtaining such an idea that some evolutionists seem to have been driven to measure progress in terms of pleasure, just as, owing to the difficulty of estimating and summing up pleasures, some hedonists have been induced to measure them by the progress of evolution. What we have now to see is whether the correspondence assumed between progress and pleasure actually exists. And, to avoid the tautology of saying that progress is increase of life, we must judge of it simply by empirical observation of the nature of human activity and of the course of human affairs.

Now the attempted identification of pleasurable and life-promoting activities rests on an incomplete account of the motives and results of action. For, in the first place, even admitting that pleasure and avoidance of pain are the only motives to action,

(a) Incompleteness of the evolutionist argument.

¹ See above, p. 167 f.

the influence of natural selection has not prevented actions hurtful to life being sometimes accompanied by pleasant sensations. Its tendency to do so has been much more effective in the lower orders of animal life than in the higher. The latter, especially man, possess the power of representing ideal states in the imagination, and are thus able to avoid actions hurtful to life, although these actions are pleasant at the time. For the hurtful consequences of the action may be so vividly represented in idea as to outweigh the influence of the present pleasure which could be got from its enjoyment.¹

And further, the analysis of volition involved in the argument seems to be insufficient. For there are other springs of action to be taken account of than pleasure and its opposite. Habit, imitation, and interests of a more comprehensive kind than desire of pleasant feeling, are all motives to action. It is true that pleasure is always felt in the successful performance of an action, and it is also true that the inhibition of will is always painful; but it is none the less incorrect to look either upon the pleasure that follows from the action, or the pain that would be the result of its inhibition as, in ordinary cases, the motive. It is motives of a different kind than pleasure, such as

¹ Cf. Fiske, *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* (1874), ii. 332 f.

imitation¹ and the influence of ideal ends, which most often lead to progress. And the progress that is due to such motives cannot be measured by its effect in increasing pleasure, nor assumed to make pleasure and life correspond. Other activities less advantageous in nature in all respects but this, might, so far as the reasoning goes, lead to equal or to more pleasurable consequences. At the best, therefore, the above argument only proves a general tendency towards the coincidence of pleasurable actions with actions which promote life; it does not show that the increase of life can be accurately measured by pleasure. The process of natural selection might kill off all organisms whose desires led them normally to action hurtful to life. But sufficient evidence has not been brought forward to show that it is fitted to produce an exact proportion between progress and pleasure.

Hartmann, however, attempts to strike a more fundamental blow than this at the presupposition involved in the argument for evolutionist hedonism. For he contends that, throughout all life, the

(β) The pessimist doctrine that life tends to misery:

¹ "Imitation," according to Kant (*Grundlegung zur Met. d. Sitten*, Werke, iv. 257), "has no place at all in morals;" and this is true if the naked law of duty—or respect for it—is the sole ethical motive. But if morality consists in the attainment of an ideal which is being gradually realised in man, moral value will not be denied to the motive which leads the individual to fashion his own nature after that in which morality has attained more complete realisation.

a) the hypothesis of the unconscious,

great pulse of progress is neither, on the one hand, desire for pleasure, nor, on the other, the more complex and varied motives just referred to, but that it is the incessant striving towards fulness of life by a universal unconscious will, which is manifested in all things, and which is for ever pressing onwards towards conscious realisation, regardless of the increase of pain which the course of evolution implies. But this hypothesis of unconscious will is not a justifiable metaphysical principle got at by the analysis of experience, and necessary for its explanation, though lying beyond it. It is a "metempirical," or rather mythical, cause interpolated into the processes of experience. Hence the antagonism in which it stands to psychological fact: its disregard of the effect of pleasure as a powerful motive in volition; and its neglect of the obvious truth that function so reacts upon organ that all actions have simply by continuance a tendency to be performed with greater ease, and therefore to yield in their performance increase of pleasure. The smoothness and precision with which it works may, indeed, lead to a function being performed unconsciously, and thus without either pain or pleasure. But the normal exercise of conscious activity is uniformly pleasurable.¹

While giving up Schopenhauer's doctrine of the merely negative character of pleasure, Hartmann

¹ See the concluding pages of this chapter.

yet contends that "eternal limits" are set by the very nature of volition, which make it impossible to have a world with more pleasure in it than pain. But his arguments¹ come very far short of proving his case. For, in the first place, to say that the stimulation and wearying of the nerves imply the necessity of a cessation of pleasure as well as of pain, is to confuse complete states of consciousness with the subjective feeling which accompanies each state. It is not true that one ever becomes weary of pleasure to talk as if there were one class of nerves for pleasure, and another for pain, is absurd. But every mental state, however pleasurable to start with, tends to become monotonous, wearisome, or painful. Pleasure thus requires a change from one mental state to another: to say that it requires a change from pleasure to something else is a contradiction in terms. It is the objects or activity that require to be varied, not the feeling of pleasure. Again, in the second place, it is true that pleasure is to be regarded as indirect *in so far as* it is entirely due to the cessation of a pain, and not to instantaneous satisfaction of will. But it does not do to regard the pleasure as altogether indirect when, although the cessation of a pain is necessary for its production, it is itself something more than this cessation. The inhibition of will often prevents the realisa-

(bb) the nature of volition;

¹ Philosophie des Unbewussten, 6th ed., p. 660 ff.

tion of an object which is very much more than a recompense in pleasurable quality for the pain of the restraint ; and although the pleasure only arises from the removal of this painful state of inhibition, there is a direct and positive gain over and above the gratification of having pain removed. In the third place, Hartmann argues that the satisfaction of will is often unconscious, whereas pain is *eo ipso* conscious. But, even admitting the reality of unconscious will or desire, which this argument involves, it does not follow that pleasure and pain are differently affected in regard to it. If pain is *eo ipso* conscious, so also is pleasure ; if the satisfaction of unconscious desire gives no pleasure, neither does the absence of such satisfaction give pain.¹ It is true, as Hartmann adds in the fourth place, that desire is often long and the joy of satisfaction fleeting ; but this refers not so much to mental pleasures as to those connected with physical appetite. Of them it is true that

“ These violent delights have violent ends,
And in their triumph die.”

But in the higher pleasures with more permanent objects of pursuit, although the desire may be long-continued, the pleasure does not disappear in the moment of gratification.

It would seem, therefore, that the pessimist psychology, in treating pleasure in a different way from

¹ Cf. Sully, *Pessimism*, p. 226 n.

pain, mistakes the true nature of both as simply "polar extremes"¹ of feeling, and prevents the argument being faced which has been brought forward to show the increasing correspondence of pleasure and life.

The failure of the psychological argument makes the whole burden of the proof of pessimism rest upon the argument from historical facts. And the attempt has been definitely made to show, from observation of the course of human affairs, that the progress of the world tends to misery. It is necessary, therefore, to ask whether it can be established that the facts included under the vague term "human progress" have a normal tendency either to increase pleasure or to act in the opposite way. Now progress is a characteristic both of the individual and of society; but pleasure only belongs to the former, so that an answer to the question whether individual progress tends to increase the surplus of pleasure over pain, still leaves unsettled the question as to the effect of social progress.

It seems evident that both the physical and mental development of the individual imply greater adaptability to, and correspondence with, the external world, and that, on account of this develop-

¹ Cf. J. Ward, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, xvi. (1882), 377.

ment, there is less unpleasant friction between outer and inner relations, and means are at hand for obtaining objects of desire with less exertion than formerly. But, at the same time, the increase of knowledge and of skill always implies not merely the means of satisfying old wants, but the creation of new ones: we see more of the evil in the world than our forefathers did, and there are more avenues by which it can approach us, if we have also more effective means for avoiding what we dislike. And, although knowledge brings with it not only the pleasure of gratified curiosity, but that recognition of a universal order which frees the mind from the evils bred by a belief in the fickleness of nature, yet this all-pervading sense of law has so regulated our beliefs and methods of research that science itself may seem to have lost the peculiar freshness of interest that belonged to its earlier stages; while the feelings called forth by a vision of the divine presence in the world, find but a poor substitute in the sublime region of "cosmic emotion." Further, the widening of the sympathetic feelings and their consequent activities, and the refinement of the whole sensitive nature by which it responds more quickly and accurately to emotional stimuli, have made the present generation more susceptible to both pain and pleasure than its predecessors. But Hartmann's argument that the duller nervous system of the savage races (*Naturvolker*) makes them

happier than the civilised (Culturvolker),¹ leaves out of sight the new sources of pleasure as well as pain that are opened up to a refined sensibility. According to Hartmann, the æsthetic sensibilities may be a source of painless pleasure: yet even their cultivation cannot be said to be matter of pure gain to their possessors; for the pain of discord is to be set against—in his opinion, it outweighs—the pleasure of harmony. On the whole, then, it would appear that the evolution of the individual leads to greater possibilities both of pleasure and of pain. The refinement of the intellectual and emotional nature opens up wider ranges of both kinds of feeling; and we are driven to look mainly to the improvement of the social environment for the means of increasing pleasure and diminishing pain.

But to estimate the hedonistic value of social progress is a still more difficult task than the preceding. For the march of affairs has often little regard to its effect on the happiness of the greater number of people concerned. Industrially, it may be thought that the increase in the amount of wealth produced affords a vastly greater means of comfort and luxury. Yet, it is doubtful whether this increase has always been sufficient to keep pace with the growth of population; and it is certain that every society whose territory is limited,

social progress:

industrial,

¹ Phil. d. Unbewussten, p 747.

must, when its numbers have increased beyond a certain point, begin to experience the diminishing returns which nature yields for the labour expended upon it. Indeed, the tendency to an excess in the rate of increase of population over that of means of subsistence is one of the chief causes which make it so difficult to assert that civilisation tends to greater happiness. But, even although the average quantity of wealth be greater now than before, it must be remembered that wealth is measured by its amount, whereas happiness depends on the equality with which that amount is distributed.¹ Yet the present industrial *régime* tends to the accumulation of immense wealth in a few hands, rather than to its proportionate increase throughout the community. The industrial progress which increases the wealth of the rich, has little to recommend it if it leaves the "labouring poor" at a starvation-wage.

¹ Bentham, *Theory of Legislation* (by Dumont, 1876), p. 103 ff. Wundt, *Physiologische Psychologie*, 2d ed., p. 469, finds in this an instance of Weber's law. Thus, the man with £100 receives the same pleasure on receipt of £1, as the possessor of £1000 does on receiving £10. As Wundt remarks, however, this is only true within certain limits. Sixpence may give more pleasure to a beggar who is never far from the starvation-point, than the clearing of a million to Baron Rothschild. Further than this, the law only states an "abstract" truth. For the susceptibility to pleasure is not only very different in different individuals, but this difference depends on many other circumstances than the amount of wealth already in possession,—such as original emotional susceptibility, &c.

“ And what if Trade sow cities
Like shells along the shore,
And thatch with towns the prairie broad
With railways ironed o’er,”—

if the population can be divided into plutocrats and proletariat? Moreover, the very nature of economic production seems to imply an opposition between social progress and individual wellbeing. For the former, in demanding the greatest possible amount of produce, requires an excessive and increasing specialisation of labour. Each worker must perform that operation only to which he has been specially trained, or which he can do best. And in this way industrialism tends to occupy the greater part of the waking hours of an increasing proportion of human lives in the repetition of a short series of mechanical movements which call out a bare minimum of the faculties of the worker, dwarf his nature, and reduce his life to a mere succession of the same monotonous sensation.¹ In spite, therefore, of immense improvements in the general conditions of wellbeing, it is still difficult to say that the happiness of the average human life has been much increased by the march of industrial progress.

A more hopeful view may, perhaps, be taken of the effect of political progress. The increase of popular government gratifies the desire for power, ^{and political.}

¹ Cf. Comte, *Positive Philosophy*, ii. 144.

and, in some cases, even tends to a more efficient management of affairs. Still more important in its effect on happiness is the greater security for life and property which the gradual consolidation of political control has brought about. It would seem, too, that the harsher features of the struggle by which this advance takes place have been modified; and that the war of politics has abated in fury more than the war of trade. On the whole, therefore, the tendency of modern political rule appears to be towards an almost unmixed gain in respect of happiness,—by the security it affords for life and property, by its wide distribution of political power, and by the room it gives for individual freedom. Yet the last of these results—in the *laissez-faire* system of industrialism to which it has led, and which, in spite of many modifications, is still in the ascendant—has effects of a more doubtful character.

This mere reference to one or two of the leading features of progress would not be sufficient to support a thesis either as to its beneficial or baneful tendency. But evidence enough has been led to show that the effects on pleasure of individual and social development are of a mixed kind,—that culture and civilisation have neither the tendency to misery which Hartmann follows Rousseau in attributing to them,¹ nor, on the other hand, that steady correspondence with increasing pleasure

¹ Phan d s. B., p. 640. *

which would be required to establish the position of evolutionist hedonism.

It follows, therefore, that, without adopting a pessimist view, we must still make our choice between evolutionism and hedonism. The course of evolution—so far as experience helps us to understand it—cannot be measured by increase of pleasure. Nothing is said here to show that it is not perfectly consistent to hold that the moral feelings and ideas, the customs to which they have given rise, and the institutions in which they are embodied, have been produced by the ordinary laws of evolution, and yet to maintain that the moral end for reflective beings is the hedonistic or utilitarian end. It may be possible, that is to say, to be an evolutionist in psychology and sociology, at the same time that one is a hedonist in ethics. But it is not allowable to adopt pleasure as the end, and yet speak of it as determined by evolution. Evolution can determine no such end until it be shown that the progress it connotes implies a proportionate increase of pleasure.

Necessity of
choosing
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hedonism.

Such is the conclusion to which we are led by a consideration of the bearings of evolution upon the increase of pleasure and pain. But this argument requires to be supplemented by the more satisfactory method of an independent analysis of pleasure in relation to the development of human nature; and from this analysis we may hope to discover

how far the theory of evolution is consistent with the ethics of hedonism.

4 The psychological analysis of pleasure and pain in relation to the ethics of evolution.

The relative and transient nature of pleasure has been urged as an objection against any form of hedonism by many philosophers since the time of Plato. And the argument has of late years been brought forward in a way which shows that the calculus of "pleasures" and "pains" which Bentham's ethics implies is much less certain and easy than its author supposed. This has been made clear both by the subtle analysis carried out by the late Professor Green, and by Professor Sidgwick's examination of the difficulties which beset the "hedonistic calculus." It does not appear, however, to have been made out that the nature of pleasure proves hedonism to be impossible as the end of conduct. But it may, perhaps, appear that the case is altered when we consider the matter in the light of the evolutionist form of hedonism now under examination, and estimate from this point of view the ethical bearings of the psychological analysis of feeling.

The difficulty of defining pleasure or pain is not the same as the difficulty or impossibility of defining any elementary sensation. For the latter is connected in definite ways with other similar sensations, can be compared and associated with them, and by such association go to make up an object or thing.

But pleasure and pain are neither objects nor parts of objects: they cannot be distinguished from or associated with the impressions of the senses so as to constitute an object. They can only be spoken of as an affection of the percipient and active subject, different in kind both from the objects it knows and the acts it performs: each can only be defined as the opposite of the other. Pleasure and pain are not real phenomena with a distinguishable existence of their own, like sensations, conceptions, or actions; they have no trace of objectivity whatever, but are, as Hamilton puts it,¹ "subjectively subjective": "pleasure is not a fact, nor is pain a fact, but one fact is pleasurable, another painful."² Pleasure, therefore, is a mere feeling of the subject, concomitant with the sensory or motor presentations which, by reason of their presence to consciousness, we call objects or actions. It is not something

(a) The purely subjective nature of pleasure,

its connection with objective states of mind,

¹ Lectures on Metaphysics, ii 432.

² L. Dumont, *Théorie scientifique de la sensibilité*, 2d ed., p 83; cf. F. Bouillier, *Du plaisir et de la douleur*, 2d ed., p. 29 ff. Reference may also be made to the leading psychological textbook. "Das Gefühl," says Volkmann (*Lehrbuch der Psychologie*, § 127, 3d ed., ii. 300), "ist nämlich keine eigene Vorstellung neben den anderen (es gibt keine eigenen 'Gefühlsvorstellungen'), ja überhaupt gar keine Vorstellung." Professor Bain's view is different, but does not altogether prevent him from acknowledging the subjectivity of feeling. "Without intellectual images clearly recollected, we do not remember feelings; the reproduction of feeling is an intellectual fact, and the groundwork is intellectual imagery."—*Emotions*, p. 63.

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which it
may be made
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conduct.

by itself which we can choose rather than something else, as we may select a peach instead of an apple. It can only be made the end of conduct in an indirect way. We must aim not at pleasure *per se*, but at objects which we have reason to believe will be accompanied by pleasurable feeling. Pleasure and pain, as it has been urged,¹ are not quantities that can be added and subtracted. It is not the pleasurable or painful feeling, but the perceptive or cognitive elements in the mental state of which it is an element, that admit of plurality and measurement. But we may foresee that one mental state will be accompanied by pleasurable, another by painful feeling, and, on that account, we may choose the former. In a great number of cases we are further able to make a quantitative estimate, and to say that the pleasurable feeling accompanying one object or action is more intense than that accompanying another, and thus to choose one object rather than another, not merely because one is pleasurable while the other is painful, but (in cases where both are pleasurable) because it is supposed that the one will yield more intense or more prolonged pleasure than the other. If this be true, the purely subjective nature of pleasure does not make it impossible for it to be taken as the practical end of conduct for the individual—however inexact and tentative many of its estimates must be

¹ Cf Green, Introduction to Hume, ii. § 7

—though it will shortly appear that its nature un-fits it to be the end on the theory of evolution.

The difficulty arises when we attempt to interpret, by means of pleasure, the increase and development of life to which the course of evolution tends, and which is sometimes put forward as the end which the evolution-theory prescribes for conduct. And the difficulty also meets us when we seek to explain the conception of a maximum of pleasures as the end, by means of the conception of evolution.

As long as we are content to look upon human nature as consisting of constant sources of activity and enjoyment, and having fixed susceptibilities for pleasure and pain, it is easy to adopt the increase of pleasure and diminution of pain as our aim. But the case is altered when we take into consideration the fact that man's actions and sensibilities are subject to indefinite modification. Pleasure, as we have seen, is a feeling of the subject dependent upon the objects, sensory and motor, present at any time to consciousness. These objects alone can be our end, but we may aim at certain of them rather than others, simply on account of their pleasurable accompaniment. It may happen, however, that an object or action at one time pleasurable becomes painful at another time, and that what is now painful ceases to be so and becomes pleasurable. In this case our course of action, if motived by pleasure,

would have to be entirely changed, our practical ethics revised and reversed. And, although no sudden alteration such as this ever takes place, the theory of evolution shows that a gradual modification of the kind is going on.

(b) The conditions of pleasure and pain.

The conditions of pleasure and pain, physiological and psychological, are matter of dispute; and the dispute is complicated by the confusion of the physiological with the psychological problem. It will be evident, however,—if only we keep different things clear of each other,—that both kinds of explanation are possible, and that they are distinct from one another. The question of the nervous antecedents and concomitants of feeling is one thing, and quite distinct from the question which now arises of the mental antecedents or concomitants of feeling. And here the theories which have attempted a generalisation of the phenomena are, in the light of recent inquiry, mainly two: the theory that pleasure follows, or is the sense of, increase of life, and that which holds it to be the concomitant of unimpeded conscious functioning or of medium activities.

(a) Pleasure not definable as the

The former theory¹ might be put forward as indicating how it is possible to institute a connection

¹ Cf Spinoza, *Ethica*, iii. 11, schol., Hobbes, *Leviathan*, i. 6, p. 25, Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect*, p. 283. Professor Bain's statement is carefully guarded: "A very considerable number of the facts may be brought under the following principle—namely, that states of pleasure are connected with an in-

between pleasure and evolution. But it has been already shown that neither the actual facts of life, nor the tendencies to action, can be so interpreted as to make their nature and development correspond, with any degree of exactness, with pleasure and its increase.¹ Nor is it possible to make out that every pain corresponds to a loss of vitality, every pleasure heightens it. On the contrary, the assertion that pleasure-giving actions and life-preserving actions coincide, is due to a hasty generalisation which cannot include all the facts. That it holds throughout a considerable extent is true. Pleasure is, at any rate, a usual accompaniment of the normal processes of the development of life; and pain reaches its climax in death. But yet there is a broad margin of experience for which the generalisation is incorrect. There are numerous cases of painful and pleasurable sensations which cannot be shown to be, respectively, destructive of, and beneficial to, vitality. As Mr Bain, who always keeps the facts in view, admits, with regard to the feelings connected with the five senses, "we cannot contend that the de-

sense of
increased
vitality,

crease, and states of pain with an abatement, of some, or all, of the vital functions."

¹ As Mr Spencer allows, *Psychology*, § 126, i. 284: "In the case of mankind, then, there has arisen, and must long continue, a deep and involved derangement of the natural connections between pleasures and beneficial actions, and between pains and detrimental actions."

gree of augmented vital energy corresponds always with the degree of the pleasure.”¹ The same discrepancy may be observed in more complex experiences. The effort after a fuller life, whether physical or mental, even when its ultimate success is not doubtful, may bring more pain than pleasure; while the life which never strains its powers towards the limits of endurance, may experience almost uninterrupted pleasure · but such pleasure is the sure herald of the process of degeneration.

(§) may be held to depend on medium or normal functioning

The theory that pleasure follows increased vitality, and pain decreased vitality, is supplemented or opposed in modern psychology by the theory that feeling depends on function. that pleasure is the concomitant of medium activities,² or of conscious functioning, which is unimpeded and not overstrained³ — pain accompanying the opposite condition. The objection urged against this view,

¹ The Senses and the Intellect, p 286. The Law of Conservation is incomplete, Mr Bain holds, and must be supplemented by the Law of Stimulation (p. 294).

² Spencer, Psychology, § 123, i. 277 · “Generally speaking, then, pleasures are the concomitants of medium activities, where the activities are of kinds liable to be in excess or in defect; and where they are of kinds not liable to be excessive, pleasure increases as the activity increases, except where the activity is either constant or involuntary”

³ Hamilton, Lectures, ii. 440 · “Pleasure is the reflex of the spontaneous and unimpeded exertion of a power of whose energies we are conscious. Pain, a reflex of the overstrained or repressed exertion of such a power” Cf Aristotle, Eth. N., vii. 12, p. 1153 a 14, x 4, p 1174 b 20.

that it leaves the so-called "passive pleasures" out of account, seems to be made without sufficient consideration of what is meant by attributing passivity to pleasure. All that such an expression can denote, would appear to be that, in the pleasurable experience referred to, no exercise of the muscles is implied, not that such an experience can take place without any conscious activity on the part of the subject. At the same time, the theory that pleasure in all cases depends upon function, must be admitted to be obliged to call in the aid of hypothesis in order to explain all the facts. If the generalisation required by the theory can be made out, it must be by emphasising the fact that feeling is never properly regarded as purely passive, but implies subjective reaction; and by supposing that the variation of feeling between pleasure and pain depends on a difference in the character of this subjective reaction. At the same time, the complete accuracy of this generalisation is not of vital importance here, as it is mainly with the feeling which manifestly results from activity or functioning that we are concerned.

Whether pleasure depends upon increase of vital energy, or upon unimpeded or medium functioning, it must be subject to modification along with the conditions under which life may continue and increase, or the modes of activity which may be carried on without opposition and in moderation.

Modification
of pleasurable
characteristics
of objects

This constant modification of the objects in which one takes pleasure, or which give one pain, is, indeed, a fact which must be admitted by any theory of feeling. A state of mind may be at first pleasurable; but, if it be long-continued, the pleasure will give way to the pain of monotony. The same is true of a painful state of mind: its continuance does not prolong the same intensity of painful consciousness, but the sensibility becomes dulled and the pain diminishes. The transition is still more striking in the case of motor activities. In learning to walk, or to ride, or to play any instrument, the first experiences are those of painful effort. Gradually, however, the co-ordinations of movement required entail less and less pain, till the feeling passes over into its opposite, and we have a pleasurable sense of successful effort and well-adapted functioning. But, just as pain gave way to pleasure, so pleasure itself subsides, the action becomes merely reflex and passes out of consciousness altogether, unless it be so long continued as to produce fatigue—that is, pain. Habit, as Dumont remarks,¹ intensifies perceptions, but weakens pleasure and pain.

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objective
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These are psychological facts—not mere theories—which hold true even of the individual experience. But they have led psychologists to the theory, supported by a vast amount of direct experiment, that

¹ *Théorie scientifique*, p. 78

there is no object or action which can be said to be absolutely and in itself either pleasant or painful.¹ The feeling of pleasure or pain accompanying the object is a function of its intensity in relation to the subject. This proposition cannot, indeed, be fully demonstrated regarding each simple sensation: to the emotions into which intricate relations of perceptions enter, it does not apply, till their complexity has been reduced. Some sensations and perceptions are certainly felt as painful in any intensity in which they are distinctly present to consciousness. But, although this is a real difficulty, it does not seem insuperable. The instances which Mill cites² to throw doubt on the generalisation that quality of feeling depends on intensity are unfortunately chosen for his purpose. For—to take his example—the taste of rhubarb is to many not painful but pleasant; and, indeed, every case of acquired taste shows that pleasure and pain can be modified through habit and custom, and suggests that, even in the case of those sensations which are painful in any form we have been able to experience them, there is a degree of intensity below which they would, if experienced, be pleasant. Experiment has proved of the majority even of sensible qualities, and analogy leads us to conclude of all, that there is a degree in which each

¹ Cf. Wundt, *Physiol Psych*, p. 470; Fechner, *Vorschule der Aesthetik*, ii 243 f.

² *Exam. of Hamilton's Philosophy*, 5th ed., p. 559.

may be pleasant, and a degree in which each may be painful, and, between them, a—real or imaginary—zero-point of feeling, where there is neither pleasure nor pain. This must, it is true, be received as a hypothesis only; but it is a hypothesis which is suggested by a wide range of facts, and which is able to include even those facts with which it is seemingly inconsistent, by supposing that could their intensity be indefinitely diminished without their passing out of consciousness, these sensations would reach a point after which they would be felt as pleasant and not as painful. Further, experiment shows that this dividing-point which separates the two poles of feeling is not always placed at the same degree of intensity, that it differs not only for every object, but for each individual subject as well, and that it undergoes modification in the course of the subject's development.¹

What is true of sense-perception is still more evident regarding those experiences in which the activity of the subject is more obviously involved. As any function may, if carried beyond a certain degree of intensity, be painful, so any function consistent with life may be a source of pleasure.

From the preceding discussion two things may be inferred first, the dependence of pleasure and pain on the subject-activity, whether the activity be that

¹ See Fechner, *loc. cit.*

of perception or of what is specifically called action, and secondly, the modification of pleasure and pain, and transition from one to the other, along with the modification of that subject-activity. To the application of both these conclusions there may be limits, but their general accuracy does not seem doubtful.

What the doctrine of evolution adds to this is its proof of the indefinite modifiability of human function. "It is an essential principle of life," Mr Spencer wrote,¹ before he had arrived at his general theory of evolution, "that a faculty to which circumstances do not allow full exercise diminishes; and that a faculty on which circumstances make excessive demands increases;" and to this we must now add, "that, supposing it consistent with maintenance of life, there is no kind of activity which will not become a source of pleasure if continued; and that therefore pleasure will eventually accompany every mode of action demanded by social conditions."² It is, he holds, a "biological truth," that "everywhere faculties adjust themselves to the conditions of existence in such wise that the activities those conditions require become pleasurable."³ The vast periods of time over which evolution stretches are scarcely needed to show how pleasure may be made to follow from almost any course of action consistent with the continuance of life. The change of habits which

(c) Application of the theory of evolution

¹ Social Statics, p. 79.

² Data of Ethics, p. 186.

³ Mind, vi. 85.

often takes place in the history of a nation, and even in the life of an individual, makes this sufficiently obvious. But, if we still think of making attainment of pleasure the end of conduct, the doctrine of evolution must give us pause. It has been already argued that, given certain sources of, and susceptibilities for, pleasure, the course of evolution has not been such as to produce an exact coincidence between them and the actions which further life. But it would seem that, given habits of acting which are consistent with the conditions of life, and which are systematically carried out, these will not fail to grow pleasant as the organism becomes adapted to them. At the best, it is difficult enough to say, even for the individual, whether one imagined object or course of action will exceed another in pleasurable feeling or not. But, when we remember that function and feeling may be modified indefinitely, it is impossible to say what course of conduct will produce the greatest amount of pleasure for the race. Taking in all its effects, we cannot say that one way of seeking pleasure is better—that is, will bring more pleasure—than another. Bearing in mind the modifications which evolution produces, it seems impossible to guide the active tendencies of mankind towards the goal of greatest pleasure, except by saying that the greatest pleasure will be got from the greatest amount of successful, or of unrestrained, or of medium activity.

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If, then, we have been seeking to define the evolutionist end by interpreting it in terms of pleasure, it appears that we have only succeeded in making the round of a circle: pleasure as the end is seen to be only definable as life or activity, although it was adopted as the end in order that by its help we might discover what life or activity meant as the end for conduct. We may, perhaps, still be able to hold to a form of hedonism, if we turn our attention from the race to a small portion of present mankind. In spite of the modifiability of function and its parasite feeling, we may still be able to say that such and such a course of action is likely to bring most pleasure to the individual or even to the family. But we cannot extend such a means of interpreting the ethics of evolution to the race, where the possibility of modification is indefinitely great, and the pain incurred in initiating a change counts for little in comparison with its subsequent results. If we continue to look from the evolutionist point of view, the question, What conduct will on the whole bring most pleasure? can only be answered by saying that it is the conduct which will most promote life—an answer which might have been more satisfactory had it not been to give meaning to this end “promotion of life” that it was interpreted in terms of greatest pleasure. The evolution-theory of ethics is thus seen to oscillate from the theory which looks upon the *summum bonum* as pleasure, to that which

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finds it in activity. It contains elements which make it impossible for it to adhere to the former alternative. The comprehensiveness of its view of life makes it unable to adopt pleasure as the end, since pleasure changes with every modification of function. And it has now to be seen whether the empirical method of interpretation to which it adheres will allow of its notion of life or activity affording a satisfactory end for conduct.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EVOLUTIONIST END.

IN showing the important bearing which evolution has on the causes of pleasure, the argument of the preceding chapter has also made clear that the ends of evolutionism and of hedonism cannot be made to explain one another. The theory which starts with a maximum of pleasure as the ultimate end, but points to the course of evolution as showing how that end is to be realised, is confronted by the fact that the development of life does not always tend to increased pleasure, and that the laws of its development cannot therefore be safely adopted as maxims for the attainment of pleasure. The same objection may be taken to the method of interpreting the evolutionist end by means of the pleasurable results of conduct. The two do not correspond with that exactness which would admit of one doing duty for the other as a practical guide. And a further difficulty has been shown to stand in the way of

Want of harmony between evolutionism and hedonism.

this method. For, on coming to analyse pleasure, we find that it may, by habituation, arise from any—or almost any—course of conduct which the conditions of existence admit of. The evolutionist, therefore, can have no surer idea of greatest pleasure—even although this may not be a very sure one—than that it will follow in the train of the greatest or most varied activity which harmonises with the laws of life.

Necessity of
investigat-
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We must therefore forsake the method of eclecticism, and inquire whether the theory of evolution can make any independent contribution towards determining an end for conduct. We are frequently told that it prescribes as the end “preservation,” or “development,” or “the health of the society.” But to obtain a clear meaning for such notions, we must see what definite content the theory of evolution can give them,—without considering, at present, the grounds for transforming them into ethical precepts. Now, it may be thought—and the suggestion deserves careful examination—that we may find in the characteristics of evolution itself¹ an indication of the end which organisms produced by and subject to evolution are naturally fitted to attain. These characteristics must therefore be

¹ Taking evolution in its widest sense, since the theory of evolution does not “imply some intrinsic proclivity in every species towards a higher form.”—Spencer, *First Principles*, App. p. 574 ; *Principles of Sociology*, i 106.

passed under review, that their ethical bearings may be seen.

1. The first condition of development, and even of life, is correspondence between an organism and its environment. The waste implied in the processes which constitute the life of an organised body has to be supplied by nutriment got from surrounding objects. It requires food, air, light, and heat in due proportions in order that its various organs may do their work. When these circumstances change, either it adapts itself to the new conditions or death ensues. Thus "we find that every animal is limited to a certain range of climate; every plant to certain zones of latitude and elevation,"¹—though nothing differs more among different species than the extent of an organism's adaptability to varying conditions. A definite organism and a medium suitable to it are called by Comte the two "fundamental correlative conditions of life"; according to Mr Spencer they constitute life. "Conformity" is absolutely necessary between "the vital functions of any organism and the conditions in which it is placed." In this conformity there are varying degrees, and "the completeness of the life will be proportionate to the completeness of the correspondence."² Even when life is not altogether extinguished, it is impeded by imperfect

1. Adaptation to environment necessary for life;

¹ Spencer, *Principles of Biology*, i. 73.

² *Ibid*, i. 82.

adaptation. Where external circumstances make the attainment of nourishment difficult and precarious, life is shortened in extent, and, within its limits, more occupied with simply maintaining its necessary functions—less full, varied, and active. The same holds good whether the external circumstances are natural or social,—applies equally to those whose energies are exhausted in the production of a bare livelihood from a niggard soil and unpropitious climate, and to those who, under changed conditions, feel the hardship of adapting themselves to a new social medium.

spoken of as
the ethical
end,

Shall we say, then, that the end of human conduct is adaptation to environment? This seems to be the position taken up by some evolutionists. In the language of von Baer,¹ "the end of ends is always that the organic body be adapted to the conditions of the earth, its elements and means of nutriment;" and Mr Spencer holds "that all evil results from the non-adaptation of constitution to condition."² The hedonism which Mr Spencer definitely accepts as his ethical principle prevents him, indeed, from fully adopting the theory of human action which von Baer seems to regard as the result of the doctrine of evolution. Yet complete adaptation of constitution to condition is held by him to be characteristic of that perfect form of life to which evolution tends, and the laws of which

¹ Reden (1876), ii 332.

² Social Statics (1850), p. 77.

are to be our guides in our present imperfect social condition. In working out his theory of ethics, he describes acts as "good or bad according as they are well or ill adjusted to ends," identifying the good with "the conduct furthering self-preservation," and the bad with "the conduct tending to self-destruction."¹ The notion of self-preservation thus introduced is naturally suggested as the end subserved by the activity of an organism being adjusted to surrounding conditions. Self-preservation, therefore, rather than adaptation to environment, will be regarded as the end, with which adaptation will be connected as the essential means.

defines the
notion of
self-preser-
vation.

This notion of self-preservation has played a remarkable part in ethical and psychological discussion since the time of the Stoics. It withdraws attention from the relative and transient feeling of pleasure to the permanence of the living being. Thus, with the Stoics, the notion of self-preservation was accompanied by an ethics hostile to indulgence in pleasure; while, on the other hand, in Spinoza and in Hobbes, pleasure was recognised as the natural consequence of self-preserving acts—the former defining it as a transition from less to greater perfection, the latter as the sense of what helps the vital functions. The theory of evolution has, of course, not only its distinctive contribution to make to the connection between self-preservation

¹ Data of Ethics, p. 25.

and pleasure—a subject already referred to,—but also shows how an increasing harmony has been produced between acts which tend to self-preservation and those which tend to social-preservation. With Mr Spencer these two points are united. His doctrine that the “conduct which furthers race-maintenance evolves hand-in-hand with the conduct which furthers self-maintenance”¹ is preliminary to the establishment of the proposition that the highest life is one in which egoistic and “altruistic” acts harmonise with one another and with external conditions: “the life called moral is one in which this moving equilibrium reaches completeness or approaches most nearly to completeness.”²

self-preser-
vation and
social-pre-
servation

As has been already pointed out,³ it is not the case, in the present state of human life, that egoistic and altruistic tendencies, even when properly understood, always lead to the same course of conduct, and even the theory of evolution does not do away with the necessity for a “compromise” between them. But, even had the theory of evolution overcome the opposition between the individual and social standpoints, much would still remain to be done for the purpose of constructing a system of ethics, or determining the ethical end. It seems better, therefore, to pass over at present the conflict of competing interests. According to Pascal,

¹ Data of Ethics, p. 16.

² Ibid, p. 71.

³ See above, chap. vi. p. 137 ff.

"the entire succession of men, the whole course of ages, is to be regarded as one man always living and always learning." And this is a suggestion which the theory of evolution only states more definitely, though it cannot completely vindicate it. On this supposition, self-preservation *is* social-preservation, and the possibly divergent interests of the individual and the whole are left out of account. The end for the race then is, according to the theory most explicitly stated by von Baer, a state of "moving equilibrium": and to this state of affairs we are at least, Mr Spencer holds, indubitably tending. In the final stage of human development, man will be perfectly adapted to the conditions of his environment, so that, to each change without, there will be an answering organic change. The ideal which seems to be held up to us is that of a time in which there will be no more irksome fretting in the machinery of life, and circumstances will never be unpropitious, because the organism will never be wanting in correspondence with them.

If this adaptation be adopted as the practical end for conduct under present conditions, and not merely as describing a far-off ideal to which we are supposed to be tending, man may continue to manifest a law of progress, but its initiation will be from external conditions. If "adaptation to environment" is consistently made the end, activity will have to be restricted to suiting one's powers

(a) As the end for present conduct: opposed to progress;

to an external order of nature, and desire will have to be curbed when it does not bring the means of satisfaction along with it. "Bene latere" will again be an equivalent for "bene vivere," and happiness will have to be sought in withdrawal from the distractions of political life, and in the restriction of desire. It is strange to see the theory which is supposed to be based upon and to account for progress, returning in this way to an ideal similar to that in which the post-Aristotelian schools took refuge amid the decline of political and intellectual life in Greece. The end which Stoic and Epicurean alike sought in complete emancipation from the conditions of the external world,¹ is now, in more scientific phrase, made to consist in complete harmony with these conditions. But, in their practical results, the two theories would seem scarcely to differ. It is not astonishing, therefore, if this gospel of renunciation finds little favour among practical men in our day. It is seen that, if a man has not wants, he will make no efforts, and that, if he make no efforts, his condition can never be bettered. Thus social reformers have often found that the classes they have tried to elevate did not feel the evil of their lot as their benefactors saw it, and they have had to create wants before attempting to satisfy them.² And the practical tendency

¹ Zeller, *Phil. d. Griechen*, 3d ed., III 1. 454, 470.

² Lassalle's tirade against the "verdamnte Bedürfnisslosigkeit" of the German workman is a case in point.

finds its counterpart in speculative opinion, so that, whereas Epicurus placed happiness in freedom from wants, modern hedonism usually considers a man the happier the more wants he has and is able to supply.¹

This practical tendency brings out the truth that it is not only by the subordination of self to circumstances, and the restriction of desire to present means of satisfaction, that the required harmony between outer and inner relations can be brought about. The other alternative is open: circumstances may be subordinated to self. For this latter alternative the theory of evolution seems really to leave room as much as for the former. It is excluded only when a one-sided emphasis is laid on the necessity of adaptation to environment. For evolution implies a gradually increasing heterogeneity of structure as the prelude to perfect agreement with circumstances "the limit of heterogeneity towards which every aggregate progresses is the formation of as many specialisations and combinations of parts as there are specialised and combined forces to be met."² The end of evolution is a correspondence between inner and outer which is not produced by the easy method of both being very simple, but which is consistent with, and indeed requires, the complexity and heterogeneity pro-

does not
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Lange, *Gesch. d. Materialismus*, 2d ed., ii. 458.

¹ Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 490.

duced in both by constant interaction.¹ The greater this complexity, the more filled with sensation, emotion, and thought life is, the greater is what Mr Spencer calls its "breadth." But, if "adaptation" is still regarded as expressing the end, then, the more perfect this adaptation is, the less room seems left for progress, and the end of human conduct is placed in a state of moving equilibrium in which action takes place without a jar and without disturbing the play of external conditions.²

(b) As describing the ultimate condition of life,

This end of "adaptation" is looked upon by Mr Spencer not as representing the conduct prescribed by morality in present circumstances, but as describing the ultimate condition of human life. As such, it is the foundation of his Absolute Ethics—that "final permanent code" which "alone admits of being definitely formulated, and so constituting ethics as a science in contrast with empirical ethics."³ The "philosophical moralist," he tells us, "treats solely of the *straight* man. He determines the properties of the straight man; describes how the straight man comports himself; shows in what relationship he stands to other straight men; shows how a community of straight men is constituted.

¹ An aspect of Mr Spencer's ethical theory which will be considered in the sequel: p 228 ff.

² Cf. A. Barratt, *Physical Ethics*, p 294, where morality is placed in "reasonable obedience to the physical laws of nature."

³ *Data of Ethics*, p. 148.

Any deviation from strict rectitude he is obliged wholly to ignore. It cannot be admitted into his premisses without vitiating all his conclusions. A problem in which a *crooked* man forms one of the elements is insoluble by him.”¹

How, then, are we to conceive the nature or conduct of the “straight man”? To begin with, it is made clear that his dealings are only with straight men; for there are no “crooked men” in the ideal community. “The coexistence of a perfect man and an imperfect society is impossible; and could the two coexist the resulting conduct would not furnish the ethical standard sought.”² “The ultimate man is one in whom this process [of adaptation to the social state] has gone so far as to produce a correspondence between all the promptings of his nature and all the requirements of his life as carried on in society. If so, it is a necessary implication that there exists an ideal code of conduct formulating the behaviour of the completely-adapted man in the completely-evolved society.” This is the code of Absolute Ethics, whose injunctions alone are “absolutely right,” and which, “as a system of ideal conduct, is to serve as a standard for our guidance in solving, as well as we can, the problems of real conduct.”³ At the outset, we were required to “interpret the more developed by the less devel-

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absolute
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¹ Social Statics, quoted in Data of Ethics, p. 271.

² Data of Ethics, p. 279.

³ Ibid., p. 275.

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oped;”¹ the conclusion sets forth that the less developed is to be guided by the more developed, the real by the ideal. Now, ethics “includes all conduct which furthers or hinders, in either direct or indirect ways, the welfare of self or others.”² Thus Absolute Ethics, like Relative Ethics, has two divisions, personal and social. As to the latter, Mr Spencer formulates certain principles of justice, negative beneficence, and positive beneficence,³ which describe the harmonious co-operation of ideal men in the ideal state. These principles may perhaps be capable of a modified application to the present state of society, in which there is a conflict of interests: although Mr Spencer’s representation of them—which is still, however, incomplete—suggests the belief that they are not so much guides which the ideal gives to the real, as suggestions for the construction of a Utopia gathered from the requirements of present social life. But, supposing the “harmonious co-operation” of individuals to be thus provided for, what is the personal end? and what, it might be added, is the social end, if society has any further function than regulating the relation of its units to one another? Absolute ethics does not seem to be able to give much guid-

¹ Data of Ethics, p 7

² Ibid, p 281.

³ These are examined by Mr F W. Maitland, in an incisive criticism of “Mr H Spencer’s Theory of Society,” *Mind*, viii 354 ff., 506 ff

ance here. "A code of perfect personal conduct," we are told, "can never be made definite."¹ There are various types of activities, all of which may belong to lives "complete after their kinds." But yet "perfection of individual life" does imply "certain modes of action which are approximately alike in all cases, and which, therefore, become part of the subject-matter of ethics." We cannot lay down "precise rules for private conduct," but only "general requirements." And these are: to maintain the balance between waste and nutrition, to observe a relation between activity and rest, to marry and have children.² This is "how the straight man comports himself." Apart, therefore, from the suggestion thrown out that a man's function may be the realisation of a type of activity complete after its kind—a suggestion to be considered in the sequel—all that we can say of the "completely-adapted man" would seem to be that he will be adapted to his circumstances.

(β) further only defines end of conduct as adaptation;

We have a right to demur if the pleasures of the final condition of equilibrium be held up to our imagination as a reason for aiming at it. That it is "the establishment of the greatest perfection and most complete happiness,"³ seems an unwarrantable assumption. Yet it is through this assumption that an apparent harmony between Mr

(γ) cannot be shown to lead to happiness

¹ Data of Ethics, p. 282

² Ibid, p. 283.

³ First Principles, p. 517.

Spencer's hedonistic ethics and his view of the tendency of evolution is brought about. It is not at all certain that the result of perfectly adapted function is great increase of pleasure. It is true that all the pains of disharmony between inner desire or feeling and outer circumstances would, in such a case, disappear; but with them also there would be lost the varied pleasures of pursuit and successful struggle. It cannot even be assumed that other pleasures would continue as intense as before. For, as acts are performed more easily, and thus with less conscious volition, they gradually pass into the background of consciousness, or out of consciousness altogether, and the pleasure accompanying them fades gradually away as they cease to occupy the attention. "Where action is perfectly automatic, feeling does not exist."¹ The so-called passive pleasures might still remain. But the fact of effort being no longer necessary for the adjustment of inner to outer relations might have the effect of making the "moving equilibrium" still called "life" automatic in every detail. Indeed, if the suggestions of the 'First Principles' are to be carried out, it would seem that the moving equilibrium is "a transitional state on the way to complete equilibrium,"² which is another

¹ Spencer, *Psychology*, § 212, i. 478.

² *First Principles*, p. 489.

name for death¹ So far, therefore, from heightened pleasure being the result of completely perfect adjustment of inner to outer relations, this adjustment would seem to reach its natural goal in unconsciousness—a conclusion which may commend itself to those of Mr Spencer's disciples who take a less optimist view of life than their master.

It seems evident, therefore, that to take adaptation to environment, or self-preservation as interpreted by adaptation, as the end of conduct, is to adopt an end which cannot be shown to be desirable on the ground of yielding a maximum of happiness or pleasure. And it is almost with a feeling of relief that one finds Mr Spencer's confidence in the tendency of evolution so far shaken as to admit of his saying that "however near to completeness the adaptation of human nature to the conditions of existence at large, physical and social, may become, it can never reach completeness."² "Adaptation to environment" must, at any rate, be kept quite distinct from any theory of ethics which takes pleasure as the end of life; and it cannot consistently determine any result as of ethical value on account of its pleasurable consequences. The goal it sets before us, and in which human progress ends, is conformity with an external order.

¹ "A complete equilibrium of the aggregate is without life, and a moving equilibrium of the aggregate is living."—*Principles of Sociology*, i. 106.

² *Data of Ethics*, p. 254.

The modification of these external conditions by human effort is to be justified ethically by the opportunity it gives for bringing about a fuller agreement between the individual or race and its environment. The result is a stationary state of human conduct, corresponding with, or a part of, that general "equilibration" to which, according to Mr Spencer, all evolution tends. But this theory, which places the goal of conduct in what seems to be the actual tendency of evolution, gains no real support from this apparent harmony of ethics with general philosophy. It may be granted that the evidence of physical laws goes to show that the evolution of the solar, or even stellar, system is towards a condition in which the "moving equilibrium" will at last pass into a form in which there is no further sensible motion, and the concentration of matter is complete. But to infer from this that the theory which places the end of conduct in a similar equilibrium shows the harmony of morality with the tendency of existence in general, would really involve a confusion of the two different meanings of "end." The end or termination of all things may be equilibrium, motionlessness, or dissolution, but this is no reason why the end or aim of conduct should be a similar equilibrium.

Indeed, to say that we ought to promote the end of evolution, and that this end is annihilation, is

inconsistent with the postulate always implied by the ethics of evolution—the postulate that conduct should promote evolution because life is desirable,¹ and increase of life comes with the progress of evolution. Nor is it of any assistance to reply to this by saying that the dissolution in which evolution ends may be only the prelude to another process of evolution in which life will gradually progress till it again reaches equilibrium. For, in the first place, this is only a problematical suggestion—is not, to speak in Mr Spencer's language, “demonstrable *a priori* by deduction from the persistence of force,” as the tendency of present evolution to equilibrium is held to be; and secondly, the new process, if it were to come about, would have to begin again the slow ascent from the lowest rung of the ladder of existence: so that, in aiding evolution towards the goal of equilibrium, we should be only guiding it to the old starting-point which has now, after many a painful struggle, been left far behind.

But further, it would seem that the theory of evolution itself is not fairly represented by a view which emphasises the fact of adaptation to environment to the exclusion of that of variation. The latter is as necessary to progressive development as the former. Adaptation to environment might

(c) Insufficiency of adaptation as evolutionist end.

¹ Spencer, *Data of Ethics*, p. 26.

seem to be most nearly complete when organism and environment were both so simple as to be hardly separate. The polype, which is scarcely different from the sea-water it inhabits, might seem by correspondence with its medium to be near the maximum of adaptation, though at the very beginning of life. It may be solely because the environment is subject to numerous changes that the organism of simple structure cannot maintain life. But it is only through its own inherent power of variation that progress in organic life is possible. Perfect correspondence with the environment was not reached by simple organisms, not only on account of the want of uniformity in their surroundings, but also because there is in every organism a tendency to variation through which the modifications are produced which natural selection takes hold of. Did organisms not tend to vary in function and structure, no progressive modification would be possible. Those fittest to live would be selected once for all, and all but those adapted to the environment weeded out.

tendency to
variation in
all organ-
isms,

It is not necessary for our present purpose to have any definite theory of the obscure laws by which this variability is governed.¹ It is enough that natural selection requires the striking out of new modifications as well as the transmission of

¹ Darwin, *Origin of Species* (1859), pp 43, 131, 466

those already produced¹ It may be the fact that variation is, in the last resort, due to changes in surrounding circumstances, to the unequal incidence of external forces upon a finite aggregate.² But, with living bodies as now constituted, it has, at any rate as proximate cause, a twofold source. It may be due to the direct effect of external forces, or it may be caused by the energy stored up in the organism in growth.³

In man the outgo of this force is conscious; and, by means of his conscious or intelligent volition, consciously directed in man. governed by interests of various kinds, he can anticipate and modify the action of natural selection. The law that the fittest organism survives may perhaps work in man as in the lower animals, if only we give a wide enough meaning to "fittest," so as to admit even of the weak being made fit through the sympathy and help of the strong. Natural selection becomes dependent upon variations of a kind different from those in the merely animal world, so that its practical effect may be in some cases apparently reversed. We thus see how it is that even Darwin holds that in moralised societies "natural selection apparently effects but little,"⁴ at the same time that we may

¹ Spencer, *Biology*, i. 257.

² *First Principles*, p. 404 f.

³ Cf. Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*, i. 101.

⁴ *Descent of Man*, 2d ed., p. 137, cf. pp 198, 618; cf. A. R. Wallace, *Contributions* (1870), p 330.

not be inclined to deny the truth of Schaffle's contention¹ that, although circumstances differ, the law of action remains the same. Schaffle points out how, as we rise in the scale of life, especially as it is manifested in human society, the organisation becomes more delicate, and other than merely natural facts have to be taken account of, so that the fittest to live in the new social and intellectual environment is no longer the man of greatest physical strength and skill.

The theory of natural selection as applied to the ordinary spheres of plant and animal life, may perhaps, for some purposes, neglect consideration of the fact that it presupposes a tendency to variation in the organisms whose growth it describes. But, when the variation in the behaviour of the organism becomes conscious and designed, there is thereby produced a preliminary indication or determination of the lines on which natural selection is to work. And, before the theory of evolution can give a full account of the ethical in man, it must distinguish consciously-determined from merely natural action, and give an analysis of what is implied in the former. We must bear in mind that it may be the case that the ground and possibility of progress and of the efficiency of ideal ends in human conduct—which "adaptation to environment" has been unable logically to explain or leave room for—are

¹ Vierteljahrsschrift f. wiss. Phil, i. (1877), 543 ff.

to be found in this differentiating fact of conscious activity. But we must first of all see whether, from the empirical characteristics of variation, we can extract an ethical end or any guide for conduct.

2. "The lower animals," says a writer on biology, "are just as well organised for the purposes of their life as the higher are for theirs. The tape-worm is relatively quite as perfect as the man, and distinguished from him by many superior capabilities."¹ It is incorrect to look upon the evolution of animal life as working upon one line, so that the different kinds of living beings can be arranged, as it were, in an order of merit, in which the organisation of the higher animal plainly excels that of the lower. The conditions of life are manifold and various enough to permit of the existence of many species equally perfect in relation to their environments. The fact that we are still able to speak of one species or one animal as higher than another, is not owing to the one being better adapted to its environment than the other, but is supposed rather to be due to the higher forms having "their organs more distinctly specialised for different functions."² Even Mr Spencer, for whom equilibrium is the goal of life, implicitly admits that "adaptation" alone is

² End suggested by this tendency to variation

¹ Rolph, Biol Probl, p. 33

² Darwin, Origin of Species, p. 336.

(a) pre-
scribes self-
development
rather than
self-preser-
vation,

not the end of human action, by his doctrine that the degree of evolution may be measured by the complexity of the adjustments it effects between organism and environment. The end, therefore, it may be said, is no longer the mere "self-preservation" found in adaptation to environment, but the "self-development" which implies temporary disharmony between organism and surroundings.

For "self-preservation" and "self-development," though frequently spoken of as identical, are really distinct and often opposed notions—the former denoting a tendency to persist in one's present state of being, while the latter implies more or less change. It may be held, however, that for an organism such as man to persist in his state of being, implies modification of his faculties, and that this modification involves development. For any organism to exist apart from change is, of course, impossible. Life is only known to us as a series of changes. But that change does not necessarily mean development or "change to a higher condition." Degradation is as well known a fact as development; and between the two, there is room for a state of existence of which it is difficult to say whether it improves or deteriorates. And whatever may be intended by the phrase, "self-preservation" points to a state of this kind rather than to an improving condition. The notion of "self-development" has therefore a richer content

than that of "self-preservation", but just on this account it cannot be explained by a reference to the nature of things as they are.

It is true that self-development can only go on by a continuous process of adjustment, but it is also necessary for it that this tendency to adaptation should be continually hindered from becoming complete or lapsing into equilibrium. It is here that the function of variation comes in. On the one side there is this tendency to vary after a fashion often without any apparent regard to external conditions; on the other side, there is the action of the external conditions selecting and favouring those variations which bring the organism into closer correspondence with them. The wide range over which the theory of natural selection applies is due to the fact that the environment is never uniform and never constant, so that modifications on the part of the organism have a chance of suiting its varied and changing character. Its changes, moreover, are often the result not so much of any absolute alteration in external circumstances, as of a new relation between them and living beings having been brought about. For the enormous reproductive faculty of most organisms makes them multiply so rapidly as to press ever more and more closely against the limit of subsistence, and thus to produce competition for the means of living. Hence the fresh lines of development originated

thus taking
account of
variability

by each organism have to be tested by their correspondence with a constantly changing medium. The altered circumstances give the modifications which organisms are for ever striking out an opportunity of perpetuating themselves.

which complicates the tendency to correspondence with environment,

By each new variation the existing relation between organism and environment is disturbed. The variation may, however, prove its utility at once by a more exact correspondence than before with the requirements of external conditions. But, in what are called the higher grades of life, variations from the type are sometimes not immediately useful, although they may ultimately become most advantageous¹ Were it not for the remarkable power of persistence possessed by the higher animals, the modified organism would be unable to hold its own. The great majority of such eccentric or extraordinary variations do, as a

¹ Thus Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 51, speaking of the "advantage to man" it must have been "to become a biped," says: "The hands and arms could hardly have become perfect enough to have manufactured weapons, or to have hurled stones and spears with a true aim, as long as they were habitually used for locomotion and for supporting the whole weight of the body; or, as before remarked, as long as they were especially fitted for climbing trees." The hands had to lose their dexterity for the latter purposes before they could acquire the more delicate adjustments necessary for skill in the former. The transition was of course a gradual one, but the initial variations required would seem to have been at first unfavourable to man's chances in the struggle for existence, though it was through them that he rose to his place at the summit of the organic scale.

matter of fact, soon disappear, because unable to prove their utility. But others of them, either by the power they give the organism to mould circumstances to itself, or by their appropriateness to the greater complexity which comes with the increased number of living organisms, and the more delicate readjustment it requires, prove themselves to be fitter to live than if no variation had taken place and the preceding state of relative equilibrium had been maintained. The higher adjustment of life to its surroundings, which marks each stage of advancing evolution, had its beginning in the rupture of the original simpler harmony that previously existed.

If we compare human conduct with that of animals lower in the organic scale, it becomes evident that there is a broad difference between the two in this, that actions in the former are purposed, performed with a definite end in view; whereas, in the latter, they seem to be the blind result of impulse, and there are slight, if any, traces of purpose. In activity of the latter kind, natural selection works in the ordinary way by choosing for survival the animals which behave so as best to suit their environment. But actions done with a view to an end may anticipate the verdict of this natural law. The agent may see that conduct of a particular kind would conduce to the promotion of life, while conduct of a differ-

especially
in human
conduct

ent kind would render him less fit to live; and, as a consequence, the former action may be chosen. In this way development may be anticipated, and the present order of affairs may be disturbed, more or less forcibly, in order to bring about a foreseen better state of things.

We are thus able to see more clearly how it is that the theory of evolution may be thought to give rise to two different ethical ends. The first of these is the theory already criticised, "adaptation to environment," which corresponds to the notion of self-preservation. But this end, as we have seen, only takes one side of the theory of evolution into consideration—neglects the tendency to variation which evolution postulates, and which, in the higher organisms, becomes purposed. The other end which seems to be suggested by the theory of evolution takes account of this tendency to variation, and may be said to correspond to the notion of self-development, but this end it is harder to define. Adaptation we can easily understand by a reference to the environment to which life is to be adapted. This involves a knowledge of the conditions of the environment, but nothing more. Development can be measured by no such standard. On the one hand it implies an independent, or relatively independent, tendency to variation. On the other hand, however, it is necessary that the disharmony with environment, in which this tend-

ency to variation may begin, should not be excessive and should not be permanent; for without a certain amount of adaptation to environment no organism can live. The extent of initial disharmony which is possible, or is useful, varies according to the versatility of the faculties of each individual organism, and to its place in the scale of being; but throughout all existence it is true that want of adaptation beyond a certain varying degree is fatal: "a mode of action entirely alien to the prevailing modes of action, cannot be successfully persisted in—must eventuate in death of self, or posterity, or both."¹

By what standard, then, can we measure development? We have already seen, from the "formula," as it is called, or definition, of evolution, that it implies an advance to a state of increased coherence, definiteness, and heterogeneity, by the double process of differentiation of parts, and integration of these parts into a whole by the formation of definite relations to one another. The notions of coherence amongst parts and of increased definiteness of function and structure are easily understood. But the heterogeneity postulated is a more complex notion,—has, in the first place, a double reference, "is at the same time a differentiation of the parts from each other and a differentiation of the con-

(b) Standard
for measur-
ing develop-
ment

¹ Spencer, *Data of Ethics*, p. 280.

solidated whole from the environment ;”¹ and secondly, is manifested in living beings in increased complexity of every kind — of structure, form, chemical composition, specific gravity, temperature, and self-mobility.² Can we then apply this at once to ethics, and say that the most developed—that is, the most moral—conduct is that which is most definite, coherent, and heterogeneous? This doctrine has at least the merit of not leaving out of sight so fundamental a characteristic of evolution as the tendency to variation ; and, without being consistently held to, it is the burden of much of Mr Spencer’s ‘Data of Ethics,’ where it is illustrated and defended with great ingenuity.

found in
degree of
complexity
of act and
motive.

That moral conduct is distinguished by definiteness and coherence—that it works towards a determinate end, and that its various actions are in agreement with one another and parts of a whole—may be admitted. But this is at most a merely formal description of what is meant by morality in conduct. To say that conduct must be a coherent whole, and must seek a determinate end by appropriate means, leaves unsettled the question as to what this end should be, or what means are best fitted to attain it. But, when we go on to say that as conduct is more varied in act,³ more heterogene-

¹ Spencer, *Biology*, i 149.

² *Ibid.*, i 144.

³ Spencer, *Data of Ethics*, p 71 : “Briefly, then, if the conduct is the best possible on every occasion, it follows that as the occasions are endlessly varied the acts will be endlessly varied to

ous in motive,¹ it is higher in the moral scale, we seem to have got hold of something which may be a guide for determining the ethical end. The mark of what is higher in evolution, and consequently in morality, will be greater heterogeneity or complexity.²

This conclusion follows from an attempt not merely to treat "moral phenomena as phenomena of evolution," but also to find the "ultimate interpretations" of ethics "only in those fundamental truths which are common to all" the sciences, physical, biological, psychological, sociological.³ Now the fundamental truths which these sciences have in common are those only which are most abstract. But as we pass from mere relations between matter and motion to life, and from life to self-consciousness, we have something different from these fundamental truths with the addition of certain others not fundamental we find that things are not merely more complex, but are changed in aspect and nature. Even though it be true that the new phenomena may still admit suit—the heterogeneity in the combination of motions will be extreme."

Difficulties
of the
theory

¹ Spencer, *Data of Ethics*, p. 106. "The acts characterised by the more complex motives and the more involved thoughts, have all along been of higher authority for guidance"

² Cf Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*, i. 94 f, where a similar definition is given in answer to the question, "What is the meaning of *better*?"

³ Spencer, *Data of Ethics*, p. 63.

of analysis into the old simpler terms, and that life, mind, and society may be interpreted as redistributions of matter and motion,¹ it must yet at least be admitted that the change passed through is one similar to those which Mill compared to chemical composition: the new compound differs fundamentally in mode of action from the elements out of which it was formed. Now, in saying that the most complex adjustments of acts to ends are the highest kinds of conduct, and that we should be guided by the more complex ~~in~~ preference to simpler motives, this obvious difficulty is passed over. It is true that Mr Spencer, in chapters rich in suggestion, and filled with skilfully chosen illustrations, has passed in review the various aspects of conduct according as we look at it from the point of view of the physical environment, of life, of mind, or of society. But when these different aspects are brought together and compared, it becomes clear that the attempt to judge conduct by reference to the "fundamental truth" that evolution implies an advance towards greater complexity, must necessarily end in failure.²

¹ Cf. Spencer, *First Principles*, p 566.

² So far as the following criticism may appear to apply to Mr Spencer, and not merely to a possible way of defining moral conduct, it is necessary to bear in mind the words of his preface to the 'Data of Ethics': "With a view to clearness, I have treated separately some correlative aspects of conduct, drawing conclusions either of which becomes untrue if divorced from the other."

In the first place, there is a notable discrepancy between the biological and the sociological aspect. For the complete development of the individual life implies that every function should be fulfilled, and that its fulfilment should interfere with the performance of no other function. "The performance of every function is, in a sense, a moral obligation." "The ideally moral man . . . is one in whom the functions of all kinds are duly fulfilled,"—that is to say, "discharged in degrees duly adjusted to the conditions of existence."¹ A fully evolved life is marked by multiplicity and complexity of function. And, if from the individual we pass to the social organism, we find that the same truth holds. The state, or organised body of individuals, has many functions to perform; but it can only perform them in the most efficient way through the functions of its individual members being specialised. From the social point of view, therefore, the greatest possible division of labour is a mark of the most evolved and perfect community. And this division of labour implies that each individual, instead of performing every function of which he is capable, should be made to restrict himself to that at which he is best, so that the community may be the gainer from the time and exertion that are saved, and the skill that is produced, by the most economic expenditure of indi-

(a) antinomy produced by it between the social and individual ends,

¹ Spencer, *Data of Ethics*, p. 75 f.

vidual talent. Thus social perfection appears to imply a condition of things inconsistent with that development of one's whole nature which, from the biological point of view, has just been defined as a characteristic of the ideally moral man. It seems, indeed, inevitable that any such abstract preliminary notion of development as that which would test it by increase of complexity must fail in such a case as this where there is no question between the competing claims of two phenomena on the same level, but where harmony is wanted between the different aspects the same phenomena present when looked at from the point of view of the individual and from the point of view of the whole.

(β) its psychological aspect

There is still greater difficulty in applying this criterion, when we come to the psychological aspect of morality—the aspect most prominent in modern philosophy from the revival of independent ethical speculation till the time of Kant. According to Mr Spencer, “the acts characterised by the more complex motives and the more involved thoughts, have all along been of higher authority for guidance.”¹ But the later or more advanced in mental evolution is not always more complex in structure; for it is a characteristic of mental development that the processes by which a result has been arrived at gradually disappear on account of the diminished attention they receive, so that there remains

¹ Data of Ethics, p. 106

what is, so far as psychical structure is concerned, a simple mental state. Complexity of structure and indirectness of origin are thus really two different characteristics of states of mind, which frequently go together, but frequently part company.¹ When Mr Spencer, accordingly, goes on to say² that "for the better preservation of life the primitive simple presentative feelings must be controlled by the later-evolved compound and representative feelings," he is really passing to a different standard without giving up the former. The sympathy with injured Zulus or Afghans which would be approved by Mr Spencer³ may be a more indirect, representative, or re-representative feeling, than the sentiments which led to British invasion, and, as such, may be more to be commended. But it would be rash to say that sympathy with the "British interests" supposed to be at stake—interests of commerce, and of the balance of political power, as well as those arising from the subtle effect of national prestige—is less complex than the feeling of sympathy with a people dispossessed of its territory. The latter feeling may be more indirect or representative, as implying an imaginative appro-

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origin,

¹ Although Mr Spencer holds that representativeness varies as definiteness, and measures complexity, including that complexity implied by increasing heterogeneity—*Principles of Psychology*, ii. 516 f.

² *Data of Ethics*, p. 113

³ Cf. *Principles of Sociology*, ii. 725.

priation of the circumstances of another community ; but, so far as structure is concerned, it is composed of far fewer and simpler component elements than the feeling for British interests.

neither of
which can
serve as an
ethical
standard.

Nor, on the other hand, can we allow ourselves to take refuge in the conclusion that, if the more complex emotion cannot be held to be better morally, then that which is later in evolution may at least be regarded as of higher authority than the earlier evolved feeling. According to Mr Spencer, the man who obtains by fraud the money to support his family is to be condemned, because, although we admit the claim his family have upon him, "we regard as of superior authority the feelings which respond to men's proprietary claims—feelings which are re-representative in a higher degree and refer to more remote diffused consequences."¹ But were this the ground of distinction, we ought also to regard the feelings prompting a man to distribute his fortune in any foolish enterprise "as of superior authority" to those which prompt him to support his family, if only the former are "re-representative in a higher degree," and their consequences more "remote" and "diffused." Many of the greatest evils which infect social life and warp the moral feelings of men, are evils which are only possible as the result of a highly advanced civilisation and a refined and delicate organisation of the mind.

¹ Data of Ethics, p 123.

The factitious sentiments raised by a subtle casuistry with the effect of confusing the ordinary distinctions of right and wrong are, in almost all cases, more indirect and re-representative than the feelings in harmony with the moral consciousness of the community which they set aside in the individual conscience. So obvious, indeed, are objections of this kind—objections, that is to say, taken from the impossibility of so applying the criterion as to construct a workable system of morals—that Mr Spencer virtually relinquishes his own theory, talking of it as true only “on the average,”¹ and even allowing that it is in some cases suicidal.²

As it cannot be held that the more complex in evolution is of greater authority than the less complex, nor that the later in evolution has such authority over the earlier, we must admit that the so-called “fundamental characteristics” of evolution, which find a place in its definition or “formula,” are unable to determine its value in an ethical regard. The richness of life, physical, intellectual, and social, has indeed been produced only as the result of a long course of development, and by the assimilation of many various elements into a complex organisation; but its value cannot be measured either by the test of mechanical complexity, or by the length of time it has taken to evolve. We must therefore seek some other

¹ *Data of Ethics*, pp. 107, 129.

² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

method of giving a meaning to evolution in the region of moral values; and we find Mr Spencer himself really falling back in his discussion on the more general answer to our question, that the end of evolution is life: "evolution becomes the highest possible when the conduct simultaneously achieves the greatest totality of life in self, offspring, and fellow-men."¹ Since it appears, then, that the characteristic of complexity or variety is as unsatisfactory a criterion of morality, as the notion of "adaptation to environment" was found to be, we must ask for some further interpretation of the notion of "development" or "increase of life" when regarded as the end of conduct.

3 Further attempt to define development or increase of life as the end

3. The ethics of evolution—in whatever form we have as yet found it—has always proceeded on the assumption that life is desirable, and that it has a value which makes its pursuit and promotion a reasonable moral end. How this fundamental ethical assumption² is to be justified, I do not at present inquire. But the question must now be faced—What is meant by "life" when we say

¹ Data of Ethics, p 25, cf Lange, *Ges. d. Mat.*, ii. 247. Lange's statement is noteworthy: "Die menschliche Vernunft kennt kein anderes Ideal, als die möglichste Erhaltung und Vollkommenung des Lebens, welches einmal begonnen hat, verbunden mit der Einschränkung von Geburt und Tod."

² The "endeavour to further evolution, especially that of the human race," is put forward as a "new duty" by Mr F. Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (1883), p. 337.

that its "increase" or "development" is the moral end, and speak of its "greatest totality" in a way that implies that it admits of quantitative measurement? The biological definition of life is itself matter of dispute. But, even were such a definition as that proposed by Mr Spencer agreed to, it would be insufficient to provide a standard for human conduct. The very generality which may make it fit to stand as a definition, or at least abstract description, of life, renders it at the same time incapable of serving as a criterion by which the various modes of the manifestation of life may be judged. One point, however, generally emphasised by the theory of evolution, may be admitted. The life which human conduct "ought" to increase is not merely that of one individual man, but the whole life of the community—"self, offspring, and fellow-men"—with which the individual life is bound up. Evolution has shown how the growth of the individual has been so dependent upon that of the whole body of society that it is impossible to separate their interests. At the same time, no complete identity has been brought about, and it remains one of the greatest difficulties of any empirical theory to harmonise their competing claims. For argument's sake, however, and to admit of the quality of the end being investigated apart from considerations as to the method of distribution, the question may be discussed as if natural selection

Biological
definition of
life insuffi-
cient.

had produced complete solidarity between the life of the individual and that of the race.

What criterion have we, then, of the development of human nature or life? The answer at once suggests itself that the higher evolution of life can be accurately measured by the amount of pleasure got by living beings. But this view has been examined in the preceding chapter, and found to be unsupported by sufficient evidence; so that we are driven to seek for some non-hedonistic criterion that will give meaning to the phrase "development" or "increase of life," when prescribed as the ethical end.

Health as
the end
either used
to interpret
pleasure,

Nor is the matter made any clearer by saying that the "health" of society is the end we ought to promote.¹ This has been put forward as an interpretation of the hedonistic principle, which brings that principle into accord with the theory of evolution. As such, however, it seems open to fatal objections. Given as an explanation of "pleasure," it falls back upon the notion of "life", for health can only be

¹ Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 121; Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 366. Earlier than either of these writers, Dr Hutchison Stirling suggested Health as a practical principle to be set against the anarchy of individualism. But with him, it is not an empirical generalisation of the tendency of evolution. It is as "the outward sign of freedom, the realisation of the universal will," that "health may be set at once as sign and as goal of the harmonious operation of the whole system—as sign and as goal of a realisation of life."—*Secret of Hegel*, ii 554.

defined as that which conduces to continued and energetic life. Further than this, there is a special difficulty in adopting health as the proximate end where pleasure is the ultimate end. Even if we could assert that health always leads to pleasure, it is not evident that it is better known, or more easily made the end, than pleasure. For of present pleasure we have a standard in our own consciousness from which there is no appeal. And, although the value of a series of pleasures is much harder to estimate, there is also no slight difficulty in saying what will promote the efficiency or health of an organism. Besides, the question arises whether health really corresponds with pleasure; and this is, in another form, the question which has been already answered in the negative,—whether life can be measured by pleasure.

On the other hand, if “health” is to be taken not as an explanation of or means to pleasure, but as a substitute for the notion of “life,” then we hardly get beyond our original terms. “Health” must be interpreted simply as that which leads to strong and continued life: so that the only information to be got from the new term is that the life we are to promote must be vigorous and long; and this was already implied in saying that it is the increase or development of life that is the end. It will not do to identify the notion with the mere balance of physiological functions which, in common language,

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appropriates to itself the term "health." We must include the health of the soul as well as the health of the body, and the health of society as well as the health of the soul. The balance of mental and social, as well as of physiological, functions, is implied in the complex life of whose evolution we form a part. To say that we are to promote this balance of various functions, is to say nothing more than that we are to promote the life into which physical and mental and social factors enter. The attempt to arrive at an end for conduct, by consideration of the characteristics of evolution, has been made without success. It has been found, too, that "development" or "increase of life" does not admit of translation into the language of hedonism: and the question thus arises, how we are to define this end, which we are unable to interpret in terms of pleasure.

Ways of
determining
increase of
life or nat-
ural good,

What meaning can be given to the notion "increase of life" as the end of conduct, without interpreting life in terms of pleasure? Can we, the question may be put, reach a "natural" good as distinct from "sensible good" or pleasure? We must discard at the outset any such "rational" view of nature as gave colour to the Stoic doctrine by identifying nature with the universal reason. And we must equally avoid the doctrine that reason regulative of conduct is manifested in the constitution of man either in a distinct faculty, such as "conscience," or

in the due regulation of the various impulses. Trendelenburg's teleological conception of human nature, for instance, implies a rational element which could not be got from the causal sequence traced by evolution.¹ For he determines the essence of man by reference to the inner end of his constitution, and postulates an organic unity of impulses which, in the form of conscience, protests against self-seeking action on the part of any single impulse. But no other hierarchy of motives can be admitted here than that produced by the natural law of evolution; and this law can only show how one impulse, or class of impulses, has become more authoritative, by showing how it has become stronger or more persistent: the other methods of evolving this authority on the basis of naturalism, do so by means of the pleasurable or painful consequences of motives and actions.

There are two ways in which, on most or all ethical theories, the attempt may be made to distinguish "good" from "bad" conduct. We may either look to a subjective motive or impulse as giving the means of distinction, or we may test conduct by its conformity with an objective standard. If we like to make use of the terms self-preservation and self-development, then these may refer either to the subjective impulse which urges man to preserve or develop his life, or to some objective

either subjective or objective.

¹ *Naturrecht auf dem Grunde der Ethik*, 2d ed., 1868.

standard for estimating actions according as they actually tend to prolong life or enrich it. Both these possibilities are open to the theory of evolution. Although the subjective impulse is, of course, a property of the individual, it may be the result of the whole course of social development, and thus take in others as well as self in the range of its application. It is therefore necessary to examine both methods of determination with some care, especially as we are in no little danger of reaching an illusory appearance of conclusiveness by allowing the subjective standard to rest on the objective, and the objective, in turn, on the subjective.

z) Subjective standard most persistent impulses,

To begin with the subjective side It may be thought that we can point to some impulse, tendency, motive, or class of motives in the individual mind by following which the evolution of life will be promoted, and that we are thus able to solve the question of practical ethics, though our conception of what the evolution of life connotes may still be in want of exact definition. As already pointed out, such an impulse (unless it depends on an objective standard) must carry its own authority with it by its strength or persistency. The case would, of course, be perfectly simple, if we could assert that the carrying out of all impulses in one's nature was to be approved as tending to the development of life. Could this assertion be made, there might be no difficulty in ethics, or rather, there might be no ethics at all,

because there would be no difficulty in conduct. It is obvious, however, that the development of one natural tendency often conflicts with that of another in the same individual, as well as with the tendencies of other individuals. The course of evolution has no doubt tended to modify, though it has not rooted out, the impulses which are most prejudicial to individual and social welfare. But the increase of wants as well as satisfactions which it has brought about in human nature, makes it doubtful whether it has on the whole tended to diminish the conflict of motives.

Again, when it is said that a man should "be himself," or that this is his "strongest tendency,"¹ there is an implicit reference to a distinction between a permanent and a transient, or a better and a worse self, and it seems to be imagined that this distinction can be reduced to difference in degrees of strength. But evolution has not enabled us to obviate Butler's objection to taking the "strongest tendency"—meaning by this the tendency which is at any time strongest—as representing "nature." For it is an undeniable fact that the tendency which for a time is the strongest—it may even be that which is strongest throughout an individual life—frequently leads to a diminution of vital power on the part of the agent, as well as to interference with the free exercise of the vital powers of others. Some advan-

implies distinction between permanent and transient self,

¹ Cf. E. Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 97.

tage is gained, perhaps, by substituting for "strongest" the nearly equivalent phrase "most persistent" tendency. All those impulses which have in the past served to promote life have been chosen out and stored up as a sort of permanent basis for the human fabric; whereas other impulses, not so advantageous in their effects, have a less permanent influence, though they are not less real. The more regular or persistent class of impulses may, therefore, (the idea is) be taken as representing the course of the evolution by which they have been produced.

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To a large extent this distinction of two classes of impulses is justified. There seems no doubt that the social, and what are usually termed moral, feelings have a tendency to return into consciousness after any temporary depression or exclusion, which is not shared by some of the feelings with which they most commonly conflict. Other impulses, not usually classed as moral, no doubt share this characteristic of persistency or recurrence "The wish for another man's property," says Darwin, "is as persistent a desire as any that can be named." The selfish feelings have obviously this persistent character. But an evolutionist may perhaps maintain that it is one of the defects of ordinary moral opinion that it depreciates the necessity and value for life of the selfish feelings, just because they are so strong as to stand in need of no encouragement. And it is

not necessary that the evolutionist morality should agree at all points with ordinary moral opinion or moral intuition. It recognises, or ought to recognise, the agency of immoral as well as moral forces, admitting that it is by the action of both of these that man as he is at present has been produced, although the principle of the survival of the fittest has tended, though by no means uniformly, towards the elimination of the immoral factor. We may admit, therefore, that there is a pressure on the will of the average individual towards certain kinds of conduct rather than others, or, put more precisely, that while all acts are performed in consequence of pressure on the will, the pressure towards certain kinds of acts is a permanent force which, although overcome for the time, always tends to reassert itself, while the tendency towards other acts inconsistent with these is more intermittent and variable, and does not reassert itself in the same way. But this subjective experience is so limited in accuracy and extent as to be an unfit test of morality.

In the first place, selfish conduct is as necessary for the preservation and development of man as "altruistic" conduct, and must therefore have given rise to an equally great and persistent pressure on the will · so that the subjective criterion of persistency leaves untouched what is often regarded as the most difficult question of morals, the balance of social and individual claims. In the second place, this

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subjective tendency is only a recurrence of antecedent advantageous characteristics, and does not lead us beyond the *status quo*, so that, if any progress is to be made in the future, it will be only possible through the pressure of new external conditions: no function is left for any ethical ideal which points beyond past and present habits of action. In the third place, subjective tendency only enables us to say generally that some acts or tendencies are more persistent than others, without giving any further description of what sort of acts these are. Were these tendencies or impulses a perfect guide to conduct, this defect would be of little practical consequence. It would prevent our having a definite ethical theory only in circumstances in which no ethical theory would be likely to be asked for. But the line between the more and less persistent motives is a narrow and shifting one. The impulses which are the residua of advantageous ancestral actions are counteracted by other impulses, residua of actions which would not be counted as moral, though we inherit tendencies to them because they formed a real part of our ancestral activity. We therefore stand in need of some characteristic by which to distinguish the one class of tendencies from the other. And as the only subjective characteristic is that of strength or persistency, and this has been found insufficient, an objective standard is shown to be necessary.

The impossibility of the subjective test doing duty alone without support from some objective criterion, is practically acknowledged by the writer who has discussed this part of the subject with greater penetration than any other investigator on the same lines. "The average man," it is said, "feels the pressure upon his own individual will of all the unknown natural sequence of motive which caused his ancestors to do on the whole more often the right thing than the wrong" ¹—or, as we must read it without objective assumption, "to do on the whole more often one class of acts than another." The right must be defined simply as that to which this "special feeling in the subject is directed," and it therefore becomes necessary "to discover what descriptions of acts inspire this feeling." ² Thus, with greater facility than would be permitted to a critic, we are made to pass from the subjective to the objective method of determination.

The question, What is right? is thus relinquished for the question, What is good? Good is said to be of three kinds—natural, sensible, and moral. But as by sensible good is meant pleasure,³ and pleasure is not the end, and as by moral good is meant "the pursuit of natural good under difficulties,"⁴ it follows that natural good is the

Thus subjective standard acknowledged to depend on

(b) Objective standard

¹ Simcox, Natural Law, p. 86.

³ Ibid., p. 90.

² Ibid., p. 87.

⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

end we seek We have thus to determine, as exactly as may be, this objective standard called natural good. It is interpreted in two ways, which, however, may be "not necessarily inconsistent": (α) "the perfection of the type as it is," and (β) "the absolute abundance and variety of vital power."¹

(α) Confor-
mity to the
type.

This phrase, "the perfection of the type as it is," is somewhat misleading. When "the perfection of the type" is said to be the end, we naturally regard the type as something that needs to be brought to perfection, and *ex hypothesi* is not perfect at present, or "as it is" But if "the perfection of the type *as it is*" is the standard, this implies, unless the standard itself is faulty, that the type is already perfect, and, therefore, that the perfection spoken of is the characteristic of a thing which conforms to the type, and not something to which the type has to conform. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that imperfection is defined as "only departure from the class type."² Plainly, then, the objective standard meant is conformity to the type. What, then, is the type? Concerning things made by art the answer is easy. The type, as Mr Stephen puts it, represents the "maximum of efficiency,"³ or, as we may say, is that which most fully realises the purpose for

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what

¹ Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 104

² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

³ *Science of Ethics*, p. 76

which the thing was formed. The best bow is that which shoots truest and farthest with a relatively small expenditure of strength by the archer; that which best realises the purpose of a bow is the typical bow. A similar explanation of types may be given regarding animals modified by artificial selection. The typical pointer or hunter can be defined from this teleological point of view; and, as long as people lived in the belief that all things were made for man, it was natural to fix the type of each class by reference to the human purpose it could best subserve. So also, as long as people think that, whether all things were made for man or not, all things may be made use of by him, there will be a tendency towards the same anthropomorphic interpretation of types. If, then, the typical products of art, and, to a large extent, the typical products of nature, are those which best serve human purposes, or best correspond with human ideals, how shall we define the typical man himself—the type which it is our perfection to conform to? “Every reasoning agent,” it may perhaps be allowed,¹ “represents a certain type;” but the type can no longer be defined merely as “maximum of efficiency,” for it is the end or purpose of this efficiency which now requires determination. In defining the typical man, we must have no idea of final cause

best serves
its purpose

¹ Science of Ethics, p. 74.

or purpose which is not rooted in the nature of his organism.

How, then, shall we now determine the type in conformity to which perfection consists ?¹

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The first answer to this seems to be, that the type is what is normal,—“what we have learned to regard as the normal development of objects belonging to” the class.² But the normal may have either of two meanings—it may, in the first place, mean the usual or customary. This, however, would make the typical man mean the ordinary or average man; and the ideal of conformity to the type would be reduced to doing the customary thing, and not trying to be better than one's neighbours. But it is evident that this stationary morality does not represent properly what is fundamental in the theory of evolution: “whatever other duties men may acknowledge, they do not look upon it as a duty to preserve the species *in statu quo*.”³ If natural science teaches one thing more clearly than another, it is that the type, like the individual, is not permanent, but the subject of gradual modifications. If the type is what is normal, we must mean by “normal” something

¹ Even were we to succeed in getting a satisfactory view of the type, we should still have to leave room for the individuality of each person, which is such that his function must differ in a manner corresponding to his peculiar nature and surroundings (cf. Lotze, *Grundzuge der praktischen Phil.*, p. 13 f.)

² Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 88

³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

else than customary. But the only other meaning of the word seems to imply a reference to a rule—either a rule imposed from without, or an inner constitution or order. If the former alternative is adopted, then we may use another definition of Mr Stephen's, and say that "the typical organism is . . . that organism which is best fitted for all the conditions of life, or, in other words, which has the strongest vitality;"¹ and thus have to fall back either on the notion of "adaptation to environment," or on that of "strongest vitality"—the notion we are seeking to interpret. If the other meaning, which the reference to a rule may convey, be adopted, then we are met by the fact that the inner order or constitution which is to be our guide, can (from our present empirical point of view) mean nothing different from the line of development. And as we have already seen that it is unsatisfactory to interpret this as equivalent to adaptation to environment, or to increase of definiteness, coherence, and heterogeneity, this principle of conformity to the type is reduced to the general principle which we have been attempting to define more exactly—*increase of life*.

. Thus the first determination of natural good as "perfection of the type" is seen to reduce itself to the second, "absolute abundance and variety of vital power." For the additional state-

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¹ Science of Ethics, p. 120.

ment, which makes the highest excellence consist in "conformity to the type as it is going to be, but as, except in a few chosen specimens, it is not yet discernible to be,"¹ is unsatisfactory. For to those "few chosen specimens" the end would seem to be simply to remain as they are—a conclusion which is hardly consistent for a writer who regards morality as a continual progress towards a higher life, a process of "climbing."² And, for the generality of men, there must be some standard for determining what is "going to be," and for certifying that the "few chosen specimens" have realised this state in its perfect form. Thus "conformity to the type as it is going to be," equally with "perfection of [conformity to] the type as it is," seems to be but another way of saying "abundance and variety of vital power," or, more fully stated, "the possession of abundant faculties, active and passive, fully developed, and in regular and equal exercise."³ The question thus comes to be how we are to determine this "abundance of faculties." We cannot do so by reference to such characteristics as increase in the number and complexity of these faculties; for a criterion of this kind, as we have seen, is of no

¹ Simcox, *Natural Law*, p 104.

² *Ibid.*, p 103.

³ *Ibid.*, p 89, cf J. T. Punnet, *Mind*, x. 91: "What the progress-principle makes its aim and end is not complexity, but the highest and choicest fruits of complexity—the harmonious unfolding of all the latent capacities of man."

assistance in deciding the most fundamental ethical questions. To say that these faculties must be "regular and equal" in their exercise, is to give a merely formal canon. For how the equality and regularity are to be brought about,—which faculties are to be supreme and which subordinate—what meaning equality can have in view of the admitted diversity in a man's nature,—are questions left altogether undetermined. And to describe the ideal or perfect universe as one in which there is no conflict or collision,¹ is to give a description which is negative as well as merely formal. We are thus obliged to fall back on a subjective criterion, and say that the abundant life which it is the end of conduct to promote is a man's strongest tendencies, or the greatest number of these. Natural good is determined by "preferring out of all the rudimentary possibilities existing in nature, the combination that harmonises the greatest number of the strongest tendencies."² We set out, be it remembered, to obtain a characterisation of those acts to which the most persistent tendencies of human nature lead us; and the conclusion we have arrived at is, that they are the acts which harmonise the greatest number of the strongest tendencies. The objective stand-

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standard.

¹ "Of real tendencies" — Natural Law, p. 98. But what tendencies are not real?

² Natural Law, p. 98.

ard is thus reduced to the subjective standard, which it was brought in to explain and support.

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Now these strongest tendencies, in the harmonious play of which natural good or perfection is said to consist, are themselves the result of the courses of conduct which have been most vigorous and successful in ancestral organisms, and they may therefore, perhaps, be taken as a survival and index of the antecedent state of human nature. The realisation—or, rather, continuation—of human nature as it has been and is, seems thus to be the ideal which empirical evolution is able to set before conduct,—with this formal modification, that, while the various impulses are, so far as possible, to have free play given them, they should be developed in a harmonious manner. It seems doubtful how far this tendency towards harmony is properly suggested by, or consistent with, evolution, which has implied a ceaseless struggle of opposing forces. At any rate, evolution does not seem competent to give any principle of relative subordination between the various impulses, such as might add reality to the formal principle of harmony. But what it is essential to lay stress on here is, that the only end which empirical evolution seems able to establish is conformity to human nature as it is—the tendencies in it which are strongest and most persistent.

We thus see that the attempt to explain on

empirical grounds what is meant by positing "life," or "increase and variety of life," as the end of action, is practically reduced to making the most persistent impulses of human nature the guide of conduct. But these impulses, it has been shown, are only the survival or remnant of past stages in the course of development, not anticipations of future stages so that evolution is in this way incapable of giving an ideal of progress as the end for conduct, and the last word it seems able to give us as a guide for action is that we should tread in the places where the footprints of ancestral conduct have left the deepest impress. The ideal of such a system is summed up in the new Beatitude, "Blessed is he that continueth where he is." It is probably just because the empirical aspect of evolution seems so little able to yield an end for human conduct corresponding to the actual course of evolution—which has been progress—that no thorough attempt has been made to develop a system of morals from the principle just reached. It is true that systems have been worked out by moralists who have taken human nature as their standard, and that Trendelenburg, at any rate, expressly includes historical development in his conception of man. But both Trendelenburg and a moralist like Butler (who has as yet no conception of the gradual modifications of human character and tendencies produced by evolution) have a view

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of human nature essentially distinct from that which has been called the "naturalistic" view.¹ For both assume a definite rational organisation of impulses similar to that taught in Plato's analogy between the individual man and a political constitution, so that the whole nature, or human nature as a whole, cannot be identified with the impulses which strength at any time makes most persistent, but depends upon the rational allotment of function and measure to each.

Summary

Difficulty of
reconciling
individual
and social
ends.

In summing up the argument of the preceding chapters, it is necessary to refer again to the discussion carried on in chapter vi. on the relation between egoism and altruism as affected by the theory of evolution. This discussion was not inserted in order to throw an additional obstacle in the way of obtaining an ethical end from the empirical theory of evolution. It is an integral part of an attempt to estimate the ethical value of the evolution-theory. The antinomy between the individual and social standpoints cannot be solved by a theory of morality which does not recognise that the individual, in his rational nature, is not

¹ Cf. Trendelenburg, *Naturrecht*, p. 45. "Von der philosophischen Seite kann es kein anderes Princip der Ethik geben als das menschliche Wesen an sich, d. h., das menschliche Wesen in der Tiefe seiner Idee und im Reichthum seiner historischen Entwicklung. Beides gehört zusammen. Denn das nur Historische wurde blind und das nur Ideale leer."

opposed to other individuals, but in reality one with them. The theory of evolution certainly seems to go a long way towards establishing the unity of the individual with the race, and in substituting an organic connection between them, in place of the almost contingent reciprocal relations spoken of in earlier empirical theories. But when we come to inquire into this unity of organic connection, attempting still to keep to the purely empirical point of view, we find that the old difficulties return, that it must be recognised that the connection is empirically incomplete, and that it gives way at the very places where a firm basis for the theory of morals is required. It was in this way that, quite apart from this opposition between the individual and the whole, the empirical character of the theory prevented our getting from it any clear and consistent notion of the ethical end it leads to.

It appeared at first that the ethics of evolution, when interpreted empirically, might be easily reconciled with the older theory of hedonism, by identifying life with pleasure—holding that the highest or most evolved life is that which contains most pleasure, and that increase of pleasure is therefore the end of conduct. In this way the end of evolutionism would be reduced to the end of utilitarianism. Some utilitarians, on the other hand, sought to get rid of the difficulties of their calculus,

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by the assumption that the greatest pleasure would be found by following the direction of evolution. But, around both points of view, and the correspondence they assumed to exist between pleasure and evolution, special difficulties were seen to gather. Any hedonistic theory might be met by the assertion that life is essentially a painful experience, and pleasure unattainable, and although the grounds on which this assertion was made seemed to be distinctly erroneous, and hedonism did not appear to be an impossible theory of conduct, yet a similar objection told with greater force against the combination of evolutionism and hedonism. For it holds the double position that the end is to promote life, and that life is to be promoted by adding to pleasure; or else, that the end is pleasure, but that pleasure is to be got by following evolution. It postulates, therefore, that the progress of life tends, and tends even in a proportionate degree, to the increase of pleasure. Yet we could obtain no proof that this progress does, as a matter of fact, increase pleasure in any regular way. On the contrary, the facts of experience seemed to show that life and pleasure do not advance proportionately, nor even always concomitantly. But a still more important and fundamental objection to the hedonistic form of evolutionism was deduced from the nature of pleasure itself; for it can be modified indefinitely, and always follows in the wake of

function. Thus the sole intelligible account we can give of what conduct will bring the greatest pleasure is, that it is the conduct which calls forth the greatest amount of successful enèrgising, that which employs the greatest number and the strongest of the human faculties. Hence, instead of being able to measure life by pleasure, we were driven to interpret pleasure in terms of life.

And perhaps at first sight it seemed that the theory of evolution could lead us beyond the pleasure-basis of older Naturalism. But, when the matter was examined more closely, without departing from the empirical point of view, it was found that the notions put forward were unsatisfactory, that they did not represent the progressive nature of the course of evolution, and that their apparent force fell away before logical analysis. It became evident, in the first place, that no appropriate end of human conduct could be derived from the nature of evolution in general. It is true that adaptation to environment is necessary for life; but to put forward such adaptation as the end for action, is to set up a practical goal which corresponds but ill with the facts from which it professes to be taken, making the theory which is supposed to account for progress establish no end by pursuit of which progress becomes possible for human action. Further than this, it neglects a factor in evolution as necessary to it as is adaptation to environment—the ele-

No independent ethical ideal afforded by the theory of evolution

ment, namely, of variation. A theory which took the latter as well as the former of these factors into account seemed, in the next place, to be given by those general characteristics which are said to mark all progress—increase of definiteness, coherence, and heterogeneity. But from these, again, it was found impossible to elicit a coherent and consistent rule for determining right and wrong in conduct, or a definite end for action: they were too abstract and mechanical to suit the living organism of human conduct, and we were thus driven back on the more general statement that “life” or the “increase of life” is the end after which we should strive. In inquiring into the meaning which could be given to this end, without interpreting it as pleasure, it was found, after tracing it through various forms of expression, that it reduced itself to making a man’s strongest and most persistent impulses both standard and end. And this proved to be not only an uncertain and shifting guide for conduct, but an imperfect representation of what was to be expected from a progressive, because evolutionist, ethics. For these persistent impulses could only be regarded as the survival of past activities, and consequently, contained no ideal beyond that of continuing in the old paths, and re-treading an already well-beaten course. Just as from the external end of adaptation to environment, so from this internal

or subjective principle, no ideal for progress, nor any definite end of action, could be obtained.

It would appear, therefore, that the theory of evolution — however great its achievements in the realm of natural science—is almost resultless in ethics. It only remains now to inquire whether this want of competency to determine practical ends may not be due to the superficiality of the ordinary empirical interpretation of evolution, which has hitherto been adhered to

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE BASIS OF ETHICS.

THE peculiarity of the conclusion we have reached is, that the theory which is used to explain the nature of progress, seems unable to give any canon or end for conduct which points out the way for progressive advance. The view of human nature became unsatisfactory just at the critical point—when we attempted to get at a knowledge of its end or final cause, which would give unity and purpose to action. To say that the end is increase of life or function appeared a merely formal notion unless we defined life as pleasure, while pleasure itself was found to be unintelligible except as performance of function. This uncertainty seems to indicate a certain superficiality in the ordinary empirical way of looking at evolution.¹

¹ The empirical interpretation of evolution is that adopted by the majority of evolutionists, but is not essential to the truth of the theory. A protest against it is entered by Mr Wallace, though in the somewhat crude form of postulating supernatural inter-

The principles involved in the theory of evolution are, in brief, as follows. In the first place, it shows that there is a tendency, brought about by natural selection, for organisms to harmonise with or become adapted to their environment—a tendency, that is to say, towards unity of organism and environment, and, in so far as external conditions are uniform, towards a general unity of life. In the second place, the theory implies variation in organisms, produced either by the unequal incidence of external forces, or by the spontaneous action of the organism, or by both causes combined. The mere increase in the number of living organisms leads to a modification of the conditions of life by which new variations are encouraged. And this tendency to variation in organisms—not merely the diversity of external environment—is perpetually complicating the conditions which the former tendency, that towards unity, helps to bring into harmony. It thus happens that there is, in the third place, a continual process of readjustment and oscillation between the tendency towards unity and that towards variety, which, through opposition and conciliation, produces continuity in nature. Each newly formed

¹ Principles involved in the theory of evolution

ference for the production of certain classes of phenomena (cf Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection, p. 359), at the same time that his conception of nature does not seem to differ otherwise from that of Hackel

unity between organism and environment is broken by a new variation of the organism or of the environment, which further complicates the problem to be solved by the unifying process, and gives scope for a more intricate and more comprehensive readjustment. Unity, Variety, and Continuity are thus the three principles implied in the theory of evolution.¹

2 Unsuccessful application of these principles to ethics,

It is from these principles that the attempt has been made to show the ethical bearing of evolution. The first of them, Unity, is represented in the theory that would make adaptation to environment the end of conduct, and the second is represented ethically in the doctrine suggested by Mr Spencer, that the degree of morality depends on the degree of complexity in act and motive. But both of these views are obviously one-sided, even from the point of view of empirical evolution. Taken together, the principles on which they depend make up that law of continuous and progressive advance which may be regarded as expressing the essential characteristic of the theory. And from this more general and accurate expression of it, we might have expected to have been able to elicit the contribution which evolution has to make to the determination of the ethical end. But after examin-

¹ The reference in the above to Kant, *Werke*, iii 438 ff., is obvious; but it is nevertheless a true account of the principles involved in the theory of evolution.

ing the various forms which it may take, we have been unable to obtain from it a principle of action.

In inquiring into the reason which has made the theory of evolution seemingly so barren in its ethical consequences, the first point which requires attention is that the characteristics of Unity, Variety, and Continuity are treated by it not as principles involved in development, but as theories inferred from, or superinduced upon, the facts of development. We are led by facts to suppose certain hypothetical laws—namely, that organisms tend to harmony with their environment, but that there are certain causes promoting variation, and, consequently, that the history of all life is that of a continuous process towards more comprehensive uniformities, passing always into more intricate variations. Additional facts are compared with these hypothetical causes, and, by their ability to explain such facts, the hypotheses are raised to the position of laws of nature, and are confidently applied to account for new phenomena of the same kind. But when we pass beyond facts lying immediately on the plane of those from which our laws have been gathered, it is to follow an insufficient analogy if we interpret them by theories only shown to belong to the former order. And this becomes still more obvious when the change is not merely to a different order of facts, but to a different way of looking at facts, as is the case in the transition

(α) the principles being treated as derived from experience,

from the point of view of knowledge to that of action.

not as depending on a principle implied in experience,

But there is another way in which the principles of Unity, Variety, and Continuity may be regarded. Instead of being simply generalisations gathered from experience and depending upon it, they may be founded on a principle which is itself the basis of the possibility of experience. Of course, no one would think of denying that it is to the accumulated mass of experienced facts that these laws owe their prominence in modern scientific opinion, and their acceptance by the judgment of the best scientists. But the process by which a man has been led to lay hold of such principles is one thing, their logical position in relation to experience quite another. Our definite recognition of the laws may very well be the result of experience; at the same time that the principle of Continuity is presupposed in our having experience at all. As long as we kept to the ground from which we started, and did not attempt to get beyond the categories of causality and reciprocity, our progress might seem to be easy enough. Although their logical relations may be misconceived, the laws are, of course, actually there, in experience: their application to the successive phenomena of nature remains the same, and may be duly apprehended. The extension of facts into laws is explained by the scientific imagination, and we do not stay to inquire into the conditions on which the

scientific imagination works and has applicability to experience. But, when we try to pass from efficient cause to the notion of purpose or of morality, we find ourselves driven back on the fundamental constitution of knowledge, and see that it is only through the unifying and relating action of a self-conscious subject that knowledge is possible or things exist for us at all. And this is the reason why we are able to say that the Unity or Continuity of nature is a principle or law of experience.¹ Were that principle not involved in knowledge, there would be no world of nature for us at all. The empirical interpretation of evolution, which has been hitherto adopted, has made the negative side of this truth sufficiently evident: it has shown that we cannot, on empirical ground, reach the end or purpose of human nature. The question thus arises, whether what may be called the "metaphysical" or "transcendental" interpretation of evolution can show the reason of this defect and suggest a remedy.

The insufficiency of the empirical way of looking at things is seen most clearly when we attempt to make the transition just referred to, and determine an end for conduct. It seems often to

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¹ Cf. Stirling, *Secret of Hegel*, ii 615: "One grand system, unity of type, all this must be postulated from the very constitution of human reason, but from the very constitution of experience as well, it can never be realised in experience."

be thought that, in pointing out the tendency of affairs, we are, at the same time, prescribing the end towards which human endeavour ought to be directed. Now, it is very difficult to say how far an empirical method enables us to anticipate tendencies of this kind at all. Even from the historical point of view the conditioning circumstances are so complicated that it is by no means easy to predict the result of their combination. It is argued, however, by Schaffle,¹ that we are at least able to see as far as the next stage in the series of historical progress, and this is thought to lead to the conclusion that we should make this next stage of development our end further than it we cannot see, and therefore need not provide. If, then, we have no ultimate end for conduct, at least we need never be without a proximate end—and one which is always changing with the course of events. Instead, therefore, of saying that we should take no thought for the morrow, the contention would seem to be that we should live for the morrow but take no thought for the day after. But here the altered point of view is scarcely concealed. From the discussion of efficient causes we proceed all at once to decide upon ends or final causes. We have shown (let it be granted) that, taking account of the present position and mode of action of the forces we are able to examine, they will modify the present state of affairs

¹ *Bau und Leben des socialen Körpers*, ii. 68.

in a certain known manner. To-day we are in state A; to-morrow we shall be in, or well on the way towards, state Ab; therefore, runs the conclusion, implied or expressed, we ought to make Ab our end. But this is more than a fallacy due to the confusion of the two meanings of "end." The conclusion to which it leads is inconsistent with, or at least shows the one-sidedness of, the premisses from which it was drawn. For, if Ab is really the next term in the series of historical progress, our making it our end can neither help nor hinder its realisation. If, on the other hand, there is really a meaning in our making the world-end our own, then we cannot bring that end, the realisation of which is conceived as still in the future, under the category of efficient causality, and say with confidence that it is the next stage in the course of events.

The idea does not work itself out in the same way as an efficient cause works in the processes of nature. We might indeed speak—perhaps with some intelligible meaning—of the tendency of evolution becoming conscious in man, and then working towards its own realisation as a fixed idea. So far as the simpler representations are concerned, this mode of action has been clearly illustrated in Mr Bain's writings; and the characteristic is not limited to the less complex kinds of mental objects. The idea is, in its own nature, a force tending both to exist in consciousness and to realise itself through the

3. Difference between causality and teleology.

motor energies¹ Consciousness of an end is a motive to action. Thus the notion of final cause includes that of efficient cause; but the two are not convertible. The idea of an end, being conceived by reason, cannot be described simply as a tendency become conscious. It has passed into the region in which various conceptions are, or may be, competing against one another, and the resultant is decided on upon grounds which may be called subjective since they proceed from conscious determination. However the laws of this conscious determination may be expressed, they are not to be identified with the natural sequence of events as it may be conceived to exist independently of the individual consciousness. What seems the tendency of things may be altered or modified upon some ground of preference by the conscious subject. In passing therefore to the working out of a rational or mental idea—such as is implied in the conception of an end—we can no longer fully represent our notions by means of the determined temporal succession called causality.

These notions unconnected by empiricism,

Thus the empirical standpoint leaves the case incomplete. A man might quite reasonably ask why he should adopt as maxims of conduct the laws seen to operate in nature. The end, in this way, is not made to follow from the natural function of man. It is simply a mode in which the events of the world

¹ Cf. Fouillée, *Critique des systèmes de morale contemporains*, p 13 ff.

occur; and we must, therefore, give a reason why it should be adopted as his end by the individual agent. To him there may be no sufficient grounds of inducement to become "a self-conscious agent in the evolution of the universe" From the purely evolutionist point of view, no definite attempt has been made to solve the difficulty. It seems really to go no deeper than Dr Johnson's reply to Boswell, when the latter plagued him to give a reason for action: "'Sir,' said he, in an animated tone, 'it is driving on the system of life'"¹ When any further answer is attempted now to the question, it appears to be on hedonistic grounds.

But it is not certain that the next stage of development will bring more pleasure along with it than the present. Enough has already been said of the difficulties and uncertainties which surround any attempt to interpret evolution as tending constantly to increased pleasure. It may be thought, however, that, if neither optimism nor pessimism is the conclusion to which we are led, the modified doctrine of what is called Meliorism may be accepted. And this theory—which holds that the world is improving, that the balance of good over evil, or that of pleasure over pain, is on the increase—might seem to form a convenient support to the present doctrine. For it may appear to follow from it that, if the next stage in

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¹ Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, chap. lv.

the world-process—that towards which evolution is tending—is known, then we should make it our end to accelerate this stage, as it will be one which brings with it a better state of affairs than the present. But not even the most enthusiastic “meliorist” has tried to show anything more than that his doctrine holds true in general, and that, although progress has many receding waves, the tide of human happiness is rising. But we cannot tell how great these receding waves may be; nor may we say that our action can have no power to check them. It follows, therefore, that, in judging of any special and temporary movement of events (and it is not pretended that our anticipatory knowledge of the future can extend far), we cannot assume that the second stage will be better than the first, or that voluntary modification of it—if that be possible—might not improve both the immediate result and its later consequences. It becomes necessary, therefore, to compare the value of the two by the directly pleasurable effects they may be expected to have, so that we are driven back to test the course of evolution by reference to some other principle. The further we go in examining an empirical theory, the clearer does it become that it can make no nearer approach to the discovery of an ethical end, than to point out what courses of action are likely to be the pleasantest, or what tendencies to action the strong-

est: while this can only be done within certain limits. The doctrine of evolution itself, when added to empirical morality, only widens our view of the old landscape—does not enable us to pass from “is” to “ought,” or from efficient to final cause, any more than the telescope can point beyond the sphere of spatial quantity.

We are endeavouring to get at the idea or end of human nature in an impossible way when we attempt to reach it on purely empirical lines, and think that, if we work long enough on them, we are sure to come to it. In the same way it was formerly thought by physiologists that, if we thoroughly examined the brain with microscope and scalpel, we should come upon the seat of the soul at last, while psychologists were fain to believe that, in addition to all our presentations of objects, we had also a presentation of the subject or thinking being. The mistake of both was in imagining that the soul was a thing amongst other things, or a presentation amongst other presentations, instead of the subject and condition of there being either things or thoughts at all. Of a similar character is the attempt to get at an end or final cause without leaving the point of view of efficient causality. Were it successful, it would reduce final cause to mechanism. To look upon man or upon nature as manifesting an end implies an idea or notion of the object as a whole, over and above

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the mutual determination of its various parts, and thus necessitates the contemplation of it "as though an understanding contained the ground of the unity of the multiplicity of its empirical laws."¹ It is the attempt to get at an external purpose for objects of experience that has made teleology be looked upon askance by men of science. A conception of this kind went far to vitiate physics in the middle ages, till it was, with justice, strictly excluded from the scientific interpretation of nature by the leaders of modern philosophy.² But teleology does not stand or fall with this external form of it, which takes its illustrations from the products of the factory, not from the manifestations of life,³ and which is really only mechanism misunderstood.

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The conception of an end is forced upon us in considering life, because then it is necessary to take account of the being as organised, and therefore as a whole. In the investigation of nature, on the other hand, things may be apprehended without relation to the conception of the whole, and teleology, therefore, seems to be unnecessary. The notion of purpose, it is often said, is essential to biology, but out of place in physical science. But when we look on the world as a whole, the

¹ Kant, Werke, v. 187 (Kr d. Urt., Einl iv.)

² Descartes, Princ. phil, iii. 3, i 28, Bacon. De augm., iii. 5, Novum organum, ii. 2.

³ Cf Kant, Werke, v. 387 (Kr d. Urt., § 65).

notion of end or purpose is introduced, and the functions of its various parts conceived from a new point of view. And the end of an organism can only be partially understood, when that organism is conceived as a whole apart from its environment. It is only a partial manifestation or example of the more perfect reality in which things are to be regarded as not merely conditioned and conditioning, but as revelations of purpose. But, although the notion of purpose cannot be dispensed with in considering organic nature, the teleological notions we form of living things are imperfect and "abstract." Thus the organism is often, more or less explicitly, judged by its utility for some human purpose. In these cases the end is clearly an external and dependent one. And, when the adaptation of its parts is spoken of in relation to its type or perfect form, a conception is involved over and above what can be inferred from the nature of the organism in itself. The notion of the end depends upon a rational ideal, which passes beyond the causal interrelation of parts to the conception of the organism as a whole, whose function is necessarily related to its environment.

Our knowledge of the ends of the lower animals is really much more imperfect than our knowledge of the human end. For the only life we really know is self-conscious life, and that we are unable to attribute to them. We know their life only

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by conjecture, our knowledge of it being but an abstraction from our own consciousness. The ethical, as Trendelenburg puts it,¹ is the higher stage of the process, a lower stage of which is the organic. The purpose, which is conceived as blind or unconscious in nature, becomes conscious and voluntary in man. But our notion of the former is simply an abstraction from the free and conscious purpose which characterises our own activity. The conception of life is only known to us as—is only—an element or moment in our own self-consciousness. And life which is not self-conscious can only be judged in relation to the self-consciousness which contains in itself the explanation both of life and of nature. The germ of truth in the old mechanical teleology may perhaps be seen in this way. For it had right on its side in so far as it referred everything to the self-consciousness manifested in man; it was mistaken only in so far as it made things relative to his needs and desires. The teleological anthropomorphism which judges all things according to their correspondence with human purposes, must be transcended, equally with the speculative anthropomorphism which frames the unseen world in the likeness of the phenomena of our present experience. But to attempt to escape from what is sometimes called anthropomorphism—the reference of

¹ *Historische Beiträge zur Philosophie*, iii. 165.

the nature and purpose of things to self-consciousness, as expressive of the ultimate reality—is to attempt to escape from thought itself, and makes one's thinking from the beginning void and contradictory.

Now this reference to self has been omitted in our consideration of empirical evolution. We have taken the purely objective ground of science, and we have admitted what science has told us of how all sorts of things came to be,—how man appeared on the earth, gradually adapted himself to his surroundings and modified them—how sentiments expanded, customs grew, and one institution developed out of another. But science shows us all this only as an external process of events in space and time—a process in which the preceding determines each succeeding state, and all parts are united together. It does not show us the process from the inside. And, in the end, it can do no more than point towards, without reaching, the comprehensive idea of a whole, by reference to which idea all the members of the whole are determined, in such a way that it is insufficient to look upon one as causing another, and with the others making up the aggregate; since each member only exists for the sake of the whole, and the idea of the whole precedes the parts which constitute it¹ The teleological conception thus necessarily leads us beyond the ordinary categories

4 Reference to self-consciousness implied in evolution,

¹ Cf Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, iii. 228.

of science, by which all things are conceived as connected causally in space and time. But the scientific theories that we have been discussing do not recognise this altered point of view; and, without giving any justification for the change of standpoint, lay down the moral law that we ought to aim at the realisation of something which can only be described as a mental conception or idea. Here a double change in point of view is involved. We are no longer considering a process going on outside us, in which the reference to self may be fairly ignored, but we put ourselves in relation to this external order: and we do so, not merely as cognitive, but as active—as the potential source of actions which we say “ought” to be performed by us.

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The assumption involved in the former change is that made by comparative or evolutionist psychology, when it attempts to play the part of a theory of knowledge. The development of impressions and ideas is made to pass upwards to more complicated stages, till it reaches the point at which the individual, conceived as determined by external forces and reacting upon them, becomes conscious of itself as a subject of knowledge and source of action. This transition from the category of causality to self-consciousness is, in some systems—that of Mr Spencer, for example—either concealed or held to with no firm grasp. Throughout his objective treatment of psychology, it would seem

that Mr Spencer is evolving mind or self-consciousness out of the process in which simple relations of matter and motion form the lowest stage, and reflex action is that which approaches most nearly to having mental characteristics. And, from this objective point of view, he speaks of his philosophy as an interpretation of "the detailed phenomena of life, mind, and society, in terms of matter, motion, and force."¹ But when he discusses the subjective side, he admits that it is entirely unique and *sui generis*,² and adopts what is known as the "two aspects" theory—the theory that mind cannot be accounted for as derived from matter, any more than matter can be accounted for as derived from mind, but that they are both phases of one ultimate and unknown reality.³ This admission involves a practical acknowledgment that it is impossible to arrive at consciousness or at subjectivity by a process of natural development. We must, it affirms, postulate two aspects or phases of existence, or two lines of development, connected probably in their ultimate reality, but, as known to us, distinct from one another, and without mutual influence.

The doctrine that a reference to self-consciousness is implied in experience, may perhaps be made clearer by considering a criticism to which it has

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sciousness,

¹ First Principles, § 194, p. 556

² Principles of Psychology, § 56, i. 140.

³ Ibid., §§ 272, 273, i. 624 ff.

recently been subjected by an able psychological writer. Professor W. James writes as follows.—

“The doctrine of the post-Kantians, that all knowledge is also self-knowledge, seems to flow from this confusion [between the psychologist’s standpoint and the standpoint of the feeling upon which he is supposed to be making his report]. Empirically, of course, an awareness of self accompanies most of our thinking. But that it should be needed to make that thinking ‘objective’ is quite another matter. ‘Green-after-red-and-other-than-it’ is an absolutely complete object of thought, ideally considered, and needs no added element. The fallacy seems to arise from some such reflection as this, that since the feeling *is* what it feels itself to be, so it must feel itself to be what it *is*—namely, related to each of its objects. That the last *is* covers much more ground than the first, the philosopher here does not notice. The first *is* signifies only the feeling’s inward quality; the last *is* covers all possible facts *about* the feeling,—relational facts, which can only be known from outside points of view, like that of the philosopher himself.”¹

Now it seems to me that the real confusion here is between the point of view of experience, and the point of view of reflection on experience, and that it is not the “post-Kantians” who confuse the two points of view. The “post-Kantians”—by whom Professor James means T. H. Green and the writers commonly associated with him—habitually occupy the latter standpoint. They do not hold that “all knowledge is also self-knowledge,” in the sense that “an awareness of self accompanies most [or all] of our thinking.” When we have this

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¹ Mind, ix. 21

empirical "awareness of self," our object is the more or less distinct contents of perception, &c., which make up the empirical ego. But this knowledge of the empirical ego, equally with knowledge of external nature, implies logically the action of self-consciousness. When we reflect upon experience, one constant element is seen to be implied in it—the reference to a subject of knowledge and feeling. Certainly "post-Kantians" do not imagine—as Professor James seems himself to imagine and to think they do—that a feeling feels itself, or an object knows itself. "Green-after-red-and-other-than-it" is for them, as for him, if not "an absolutely complete object of thought," yet relatively complete. It may be apprehended alone as a part of experience. But reflection on experience shows that it, like any other object of thought, depends upon a knowing subject. The "post-Kantians" do not assert that knowing an object involves for the individual knower actual consciousness of what his knowledge implies, any more than they would say that the "plain man" is already a metaphysician. But they hold that reflection on experience shows that self-reference, or reference to a subject, is a logical condition of there being experience at all. So far from confusing the two standpoints, they require carefully to emphasise their difference, lest the actual content of a state of consciousness in the individual man be held to be equivalent to the

grounds or conditions of that state of consciousness.

The reason why there is even an apparent plausibility in the attempt to get at a natural development of self-consciousness, is that the reference to self is, from the outset, implicitly, but logically, assumed in tracing the sequence of events which forms the subject-matter of the theory of evolution, while the course of development does nothing more than render its implication explicit. Self-consciousness is not something that exists apart from the world of known and knowable objects, any more than it is itself a special department of this world of objects distinguishable from, and determined by, its surroundings. It is, on the contrary, the supreme condition of the world of objects having any existence whatever. It is only through objects being brought into relation with the identical and permanent subject of knowledge, that there is unity in nature, or, in other words, that there is a known world of nature or experience at all. The evolution of mind or self-consciousness out of experience is, therefore, not merely to be rejected as a problem too intricate for psychological analysis. It is a mistake to think that it is a possible problem at all; for it attempts to make experience account for and originate the principles on which its own possibility depends.

(b) made

But it is the second change in point of view

which needs special emphasis here—the change from the point of view of science to that of morality. Taken in its bare form, this is perhaps little more than a confusion of thought. The fact of things being of a certain constitution, and of their progress tending in a certain direction, cannot of itself supply a law for the exercise of our activity. But the view is associated with a theory of the nature of human action which seeks to bring it into the strict line of natural development. Just as empirical psychology attempted to treat self-consciousness as a stage in the evolution of experience or knowledge, so the empirical theory of morality, aided by the doctrine of evolution, tries to show how the action which is called moral has been developed out of purely physical or reflex action. But this theory of the development of moral action is really open to the same objection as that which was urged against the theory which evolves self-consciousness from the unconscious. The objection to the latter was, that experience, itself constituted by consciousness, is made to produce the condition of its own possibility; and a similar confusion is involved in attempting to develop moral action out of merely physical or reflex action. The only case of true psychical or conscious action is that in which there is a conscious determination of end and means; and action of this kind implies the same relation to self-consciousness as that by which knowledge is

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constituted. The relation is, however, manifested in a different way: it is not an apprehension of the manifold of impression into the unity of consciousness, but the externalisation of self-consciousness in realising a conceived end or idea. Now, in so far as physical and psychical facts are phenomena of experience—and they have no other existence, at least none that can have any intelligible meaning given to it—they presuppose self-consciousness; for it is only in relation to it that experience is possible. That is to say, their existence logically implies a reference to a subject whose active externalising manifestation is the determination of means and end which constitutes moral (as distinguished from merely natural) action. So far, therefore, from our being able to trace the development of moral action from the simpler phenomena of natural action, we find that these, in their most rudimentary form, by virtue of their being phenomena of experience, imply and receive their reality from the self-consciousness which is the [differentiating quality both of knowledge and of moral action.

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From this it follows that, although, empirically, the change from the point of view of science to that of morality is a transition to a different order of facts, yet the passage may be possible transcendently through self-consciousness. For in self-consciousness we reach the element of identity between knowledge and action. It is, therefore, of import-

ance to understand the nature of this self-conscious ^{knowledge} activity in relation to knowledge and to action. If ^{to mora} the fundamental characteristic of knowledge is the bringing into relation to consciousness, then all conscious action has this characteristic; for it determines self towards some particular line of activity—that is to say, towards an object or end which is thereby related to consciousness. Action therefore, we may say, is knowledge. And in the same way, on the other hand, since the relating to consciousness which constitutes knowledge can only be regarded as originated by the subject, it follows, conversely, that knowledge is action.¹ “We act,” says Spinoza, “only in so far as we know or understand.” Action is but one aspect or manifestation of that which, in another aspect or manifestation, is knowledge. But the aspect of self-consciousness we call knowledge and that we call action are different from one another. In the former the relating to consciousness in the definite forms of thought and perception is the prominent thing. In the latter it is the realising energy of the self-conscious

¹ From “action” in this its ultimate meaning as equivalent to origination by the subject, it is necessary to distinguish “action” as a phenomenon in the external world. The latter is one of the modes in which the relation of objects is known to us, the former a characteristic of knowing. The active nature of knowledge is worked out in an interesting way in Professor S S Laurie’s ‘*Metaphysica nova et vetusta*,’ by “Scotus Novanticus” (1884)

subject. The ordinary distinction between knowledge and action is therefore correct, if not pushed to the extent of making an absolute separation between them: in the former we idealise the real, in the latter we realise the ideal. But they are at one in this, that both involve self-conscious activity.

(b) as determining the character of the ethical end,

The self-consciousness which in one relation is knowledge, in another action, is thus the fundamental fact of human nature, and on it, therefore, the ethical end must be based, if that end can be disclosed by the nature of man, and is to express what is most fundamental in his nature. Now, as knowledge finds its completion when all things are connected with one another and the subject in a definite system of relations, the end of completed self-conscious activity cannot be different. In their final perfection, as in their fundamental nature, the two are at one. As Kant puts it,¹ the speculative and the practical reason are reconciled in the notion of end. However virtue may differ from knowledge in the processes of ordinary experience, the distinction only belongs to their finite realisation. An intuitive understanding, or understanding which, in knowing, creates the objects of knowledge, is the highest conception of reason. Yet the very notion of a finite self implies that neither such knowledge nor such activity belongs to it. In knowledge and action, as properties of the ultimate

¹ Werke, iii. 538; cf. Adamson, *Philosophy of Kant*, p. 138.

self-consciousness, human beings only participate. It is only by means of the laborious methods of observation and inference that they approach the intuition of all things as a unity in which perfect knowledge consists; and, in the same way, it is only by the gradual volitional adaptation of means to end that they are able, in some measure, to contribute to the realisation of self-consciousness in the world

An end can only be made our own when conceived as necessary for realising or completing our idea of self. Conscious volition only follows a conceived want, or recognition that the self as imagined—the ideal self—is not realised in the actual self. The action is towards a fuller working out of the idea of self; and the end may therefore, in all cases of conscious action, be said to be self-realisation, though the nature of this end differs according to each man's conception of self. This may be expressed, as Green expresses it, by saying that "self-satisfaction is the form of every object willed, but . . . it is on the specific difference of the objects willed under the general form of self-satisfaction that the quality of the will must depend."¹ It appears to me, however, that this statement requires to be guarded by an explanation. The self-satisfaction sought must not be looked upon as a feeling,—for if it is, it can only be

¹ *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 161.

interpreted psychologically as pleasure — but as simply conscious self-realisation. And this self-realisation is the objective consciousness of an attained end, which is accompanied by, but is not the same as, the feeling of pleasure. Self-realisation is the end, not the pleasurable feeling which follows it; self-satisfaction, not the “pleasure of self-satisfaction.” In this way, the common experience “that the objects with which we seek to satisfy ourselves do not turn out capable of satisfying us,”¹ might be expressed by saying that the method adopted for the realisation of self is often found in its result to lead to incomplete, or even to illusory, self-realisation.

The question thus arises, What is the true self that is to be realised, and what is meant by the realisation of it? The will that wills itself is as bare a notion in ethics, as the thought that thinks itself is in metaphysics. The “good will,” which Kant rightly held to be the only ultimate good, never altogether escaped this formality in Kant’s own treatment of it. His idea of humanity as a realm of ends was limited by his formal conception of the function of reason, though it suggests the way by which the mere tautology of will may be transcended. It is of the essence of a finite will that its end is different from the realisation of the end. But the rationality of the will implies that it

¹ Prolegomena to Ethics, p. 165

must aim at nothing less than the harmonious articulation of its whole activity in the unity of self-consciousness.

It has been argued above that both knowledge and morality are expressions of self-conscious activity. In it these different manifestations find an element of fundamental identity. But it may be maintained, further, that this "unity of self-consciousness" is not merely the unity of the different states of an individual, but that it is an element which transcends the difference by which concrete individuals are distinguished from one another. If this view can be carried out, it seems to lead us to attribute to other men something more than a "similar consciousness"¹ to our own, and to make us look on all self-conscious beings as sharing in, or manifesting, in various imperfect ways, one identical self-consciousness. From this point of view, self-realisation would be established as no mere individual end. The first law of morality would be not the "natural" impulse for each to take care of himself in the struggle for life, but, on the contrary, the sublation of that distinction between the particular ego and other individuals which would admit of the one using the others as mere means to his own advancement. His true end is the same as theirs. the realisation of the self-consciousness in which both partake—its realis-

but as transcending egoism,

¹ Sidgwick, "Green's Ethics," *Mind*, ix 180.

ation, that is to say, not in one individual only, but wherever it is manifested.¹ This is the rationale of what the empirical theory of evolution tries to establish by pointing to the growing harmony in feeling and interest between the individual and society. What evolution really shows is the gradual manifestation in actual volition of the identity of nature in all men.² I do not say that this fundamental identity of nature does away with all conflict between self-realisation in one's self and in others; but it does much, if it establishes the principle that the realisation of one's own nature involves the realisation of that of others. As Schäffle says, 'the moral law is the direction of the will to the genuinely human as humanity,' and "this is a transcendental element embedded in the hearts of all men—though in its basis only, for it is developed and ripened in the course of history."³ And the more fully self-consciousness is realised, the clearer does it become that its complete realisation implies that "kingdom of ends" spoken of by Kant, in which all self-conscious beings are at once subjects and sovereign.

¹ This is implied in Hegel's well-known imperative, "Be a person and respect others as persons"—*Phil. d. Rechts*, p. 73

² Thus Hoffding maintains that "the highest ethical idea" is "the idea of the human race as a realm of personalities"—*Grundlage der humanen Ethik* (aus dem dänischen), p. 74.

³ *Bau und Leben des socialen Körpers*, i. 173

Further, self-realisation in both its aspects—as individual and as social—is necessarily progressive. It is only at the highest stage of its development that nature becomes the organ of intelligence and morality.¹ And, just as knowledge expresses itself through the forms of space and time, and, therefore, by gradual colligations of facts, so the conscious determination of activity is manifested in the world in an order of consecutive acts, and is therefore subject, in its manifestation, to the laws of temporal succession. It is the part of a system of metaphysics—at any rate, it does not belong to the present inquiry—to show how reason manifests itself in space and time, and how, through the rationality of this manifestation, everything in space is and acts only in relation to its environment, and through it, to the rest of the world, and how each event in time is the result of preceding events, and determines those which follow it. What it thus shows the necessity of is the process of evolution; and it is because this process is determined by reason that the world is the object of knowledge and the sphere of moral action. Evolution is thus not the foundation of morality, but the manifestation of the principle on which it depends. Morality cannot be explained by means of its own development, without reference to the self-consci-

(c) as showing that the realisation of the end must be progressive.

¹ Cf. H. Siebeck, *Philosophische Monatshefte*, xx. 340

ousness which makes that development possible. However valuable may be the information we get from experience as to the gradual evolution of conduct, its nature and end can only be explained by a principle that transcends experience.

THE END